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[“NIEL,” SADIE WHISPERS, “WILL YOU REALLY LOVE ME, AND YET KNOW NOTHING?”]

LORD OF HER LOVE.

CHAPTER XVI.

“How I love the sea!” Bee exclaims, as they stand with the water lapping a few inches from their feet. “I should just like to take off my shoes and stockings and paddle along in those delicious white-topped little waves.”

“Bee, you are a perfect baby!” Sadie says, with a faint smile.

She envies the girl her light-heartedness—this child who has been both wife and widow, and who is not yet arrived at twenty years. It is Sadie who should wear weeds, for her young life has been saddened and ruined, whilst Bee Dalrymple’s is yet to come.

“Yes, I suppose I am a baby,” Bee agrees, with a mock sigh. “Somehow I seem as if I should never grow up; but don’t forget, Miss Derwent, all the same, that I am your chaperon, and must be treated with due respect accordingly.”

Sadie smiles and listens to her chatter in silence, till Niel’s name crops up again.

“I am a little worried to see him looking so pale. I wonder if he has anything on his mind?” Bee says, thoughtfully. “I often think he frets over his past.”

Sadie looks at her quickly, and somehow her heart beats in a strange and uncomfortable way.

“His past,” she repeats. “He—he has not had trouble, has he?”

Bee nods her head.

“Did you never hear Niel’s story?”

“Who was there to tell me anything?” Sadie answers, a little bitterly.

“I thought I had spoken about it to you?” Bee says. “It all happened five years ago. I was at school then, but I was not too young to understand all that concerned Niel—how he loved her!”

Sadie is silent. “Why should she feel pain at these words?” she dimly asks herself.

“Tell me all, Bee,” she says, hurriedly and eagerly.

“There isn’t very much to tell—only an old story. Niel met Sybil Warner at some country house. She was very beautiful, and he

was only a boy—for a man is not much else at twenty-four, is he? But, boy or no boy, he fell madly in love with her. I remember, Sadie, when he first showed me her picture, and said I must grow to love her as I loved him, and that I must not be jealous of her, for she was going to be his wife. I thought she was very lovely, of course. Who could not? But somehow I did not like her face, only a woman’s intuition, I suppose,” Bee adds, “yet an intuition that was but truly founded, as I soon discovered. I said nothing of this to Niel, however, for I did not care to throw any obstacle in the way of his happiness; and, girl as I was, I knew that he held her dearer almost than his life. But deep down in my heart, Sadie, I was not happy. Sybil came to see me, and I felt we should never be friends. I tried not to be jealous, it was so hard, for Niel and I were the only ones left, and I had none but him; and I think I succeeded, though I used to cry bitterly at night when I went to bed.”

“Poor little Bee!” Sadie murmurs, gently. Her own lips are trembling, and she dreads yet longer to hear the end of this story. “What



"has come to her," she adds herself, vaguely, "that it should give her such pain?"

"*Old* ~~but~~ *these* days are all gone, thank Heaven!" Bee answers, flinging a shell into the rolling waves. "Shall I go on, Sadie, or am I boring you with this long story?"

No, no! Please go on, Bee."

Little Mrs. Dalrymple casts a hurried glance at the lovely girlish face beside her, and something in the expression seems to please her; and she makes no remark, however, but after a slight pause goes on slowly,—

"Well they were to have been married in the spring. Niel was not rich then, Sadie; he was only a struggling engineer. Our mother, though the daughter of an earl and the sister of another, had never been anything but a poor woman. Our father died years before her, and bequeathed nothing to us but his brains and blessing—very good things in their way, Sadie, but not exactly the equivalent of money; and so Miss Sybil Warner soon discovered.

"She had evidently imagined Niel to be a man of property, as when she first met him he was launched into society under the auspices of our mother's brother, the present Earl of Ardean; but when she found that his large income was represented by just one hundred a year and a stock of clever brains she changed her mind, and, in plain words, backed out of her engagement with Niel to enter into a new one with another man, who could give her all she required."

Bee's voice is contempt itself, and she kicks aside a pebble into the sea as though she were disposing of the worldly Miss Warner in this summary manner.

"Then comes the sequel," she says, with a short laugh. "Our father's brother, old General Gwynne, died, and left all his money to Niel; and at that very moment the man for whom Sybil Warner had so cruelly deserted Niel turned on her and treated her in a like manner, so between two stools she fell to the ground!"

Sadie is looking straight across the sea. "And—and she jilted Niel?" she says slowly.

"Yes, she jilted him. It is a nasty world, but a true one in this case, for poor Niel was *infatuated* in the lump."

"And—and did he care very much?"

Sadie's voice trembles just a little. "It nearly broke his heart at first," Bee answers, gravely; "for he loved Sybil so deeply, so truly. Ah, she did a foolish thing when she threw Niel aside for anyone else. I don't care who they might be—but you must forgive a sister's partiality!"

"I understand you, I think," Sadie answers. Then, in a lower tone, "And—and you think he is fretting about her now?"

Bee puckles up her pretty brow.

"Of course I would not say so to him for worlds; but I can't help thinking so when I see him so pale and care-worn, as he looks tonight. He has the old, pained expression that he used to wear, and I know of no other cause but this one."

Bee pretends to be gazing out to the horizon, but, in reality, she is studying Sadie's face most carefully.

"And—and is she—free now?" Sadie asks, after a pause.

"Yes, I believe so. It is a strange thing, considering how beautiful she is."

Sadie feels a suffocating sensation in the region of her heart. Dimly she is conscious of a great pain, as if she were about to lose something or someone who had grown very, very dear to her.

"Perhaps," she says, in a low voice, "perhaps they—they may come together again. Bee. Who knows? She may be sorry; perhaps she did not know what she was doing when she jilted him so cruelly."

"Oh! I think she was perfectly cognizant of her actions," Bee answers, drily.

There is another pause—Sadie breaks it.

"If he is fretting for her, Bee, why should you not try to bring them together again?"

She grows pale as she says this.

"I shall think about it," Bee says, abruptly. Then turning, "Here they come—I wish you would try and persuade Niel to stay longer, Sadie."

"I!" Sadie exclaims, her cheek flushing nervously. "I fear I have no influence."

She is looking a sweet picture in her long white gown, with a hat of white linen flapping on her dark hair, and Niel's pulses thrill as he gazes at her, so delicate and flower-like in her beauty; and his heart sinks as he thinks of the long dreary years before him—when she is lost to him for ever.

Bee's proposal is agreed to at once, but Philip Brewer suggests an amendment.

"Let us walk there and back in the moonlight! It will be healthful, and I can take realistic notes for my novel with your aid, Mrs. Dalrymple!"

"Here is a crab to begin with," Bee laughs, pointing to the three-cornered crab-looking animal that is burrowing across the sand. "Now, Mr. Brewer, I will walk you to the corner of the sand-hill. You must give me ten yards start!"

"Fifty if you like," Philip cries, and away they go.

Niel looks after them, and frowns slightly. Bee ought not to take Philip away in that manner, he thinks.

"I have brought you a shawl. Mary told me to be sure and put it on," he says, turning to Sadie.

"I am not cold yet."

"Your dress is thin though, and the night air is chilly down here."

"I do not intend to be coddled any more, Mr. Gwynne," Sadie observes, with a faint smile. She tries to be easy and comfortable with him, but she is thinking of what Bee has just said to her, and she is irritating him with all her heart.

"And he has suffered too!" she says to herself. "He knows what it is to throw all one's love and trust on one who pays it back in cruelty; yet he has not been tried as I have been. Heaven forbid that anyone should suffer what I have suffered these last months, especially him. He is also good!"

Yes, this is the one predominant idea in her mind: Niel's goodness, his honesty. She feels an atmosphere of reliance and comfort in his presence. She wonders vaguely as she walks beside him, looking up into his kind, grave face with those handsome, earnest eyes, how any woman could have treated him badly.

"Bee is out of sight," Niel says, breaking the silence. He flicks away the ash of his cigar, as he speaks; he is smoking at Sadie's express solicitation. "I am sorry she has carried off Mr. Brewer in that fashion; you must forgive her."

Sadie looks at him in startled surprise.

"There is nothing to forgive," she says, hurriedly.

Niel smokes in silence for a moment.

"I mean," he continues, gently, "that you would naturally like to have him with you, and I am—"

"I don't understand you," Sadie interrupts him with unceremoniousness. "Please do not speak like this, Mr. Gwynne. I—I don't like it."

Niel flings away his half-finished cigar.

"Forgive me if I have vexed you. I seem unfortunate in my remarks."

"You are, most certainly, when you say such things as you have just done."

Sadie's tone is very cold, and for the next few moments they walk on in silence. After that Niel begins to speak again of the railway and her property, and as they follow a long way behind the other two, apparently chattering easily, but, in reality, carrying on a laboured, uphill conversation which is painful to both.

CHAPTER XVII.

Starmouth is, if anything, a quieter place than Tidemouth. There are a few visitors at the latter place, but Starmouth is given over entirely to its small population of fisher-folk, and lives a peaceful, humble kind of existence.

Consequently, the advent of four strange people walking along the sands is at once a surprise and a delight to the women-and-children, who sit knitting and playing about in groups over the boats.

Niel insists on waiting half-an-hour before starting for home; he does this ostensibly for both Bee and Sadie's sakes; but Bee knows that he is not anxious about her. The walk is nothing to her; she shows no more fatigue than a fast-trotting little pony.

Sadie is glad to sit and rest. Walking on the sand is always tiring, and, somehow, this evening she feels as depressed and miserable as she did when first she came down to the sea. Her thoughts are troubled ones, and it is very curious, but Niel mingles in with them in a persistent and vexing fashion.

There is a difficulty about boats. They should have four oars, and have sentines on from Tidemouth. Niel tried hard to induce the men to push one out for them, but to no effect. "They were not used to these sort of trips, and were one and all going to bed," so they answer, and at last in despair he has to give it up.

"What shall we do?" he says to Philip. "I am afraid of overtaxing Miss Darwent's strength."

"I can walk easily," Sadie declares, with a touch of colour creasing her face.

"Why not return by the road? It will be easier walking—the sand is so heavy," Bee argues.

"That sounds better, but still," Niel hesitates, and glances at the girl.

"I assure you I can walk quite well," she replies, meeting his glance.

And so, as they can do nothing else—boats are impossible, and a vehicle of any sort not to be had for love or money—he has to give in.

"Then you must take my arm," he commands. "I am sorry now I permitted you to come."

"Oh! but I am my own mistress in these small things, surely?" Sadie cries, pettishly. And then she is vexed the next moment, for she sees an expression of pain flit across his face.

"You must tell me when I grow too dictatorial; I am apt to be so sometimes," he says, with a faint smile, which does not touch his eyes, however. "My honours of guardian-ship are still as now, you see."

Sadie makes no reply, and they pass out of the narrow village street in silence. Bee and Mr. Brewer are chatting away merrily, and are evidently enjoying themselves, if the laughter that is wafted back is a true sign of enjoyment. Sadie has not taken Niel's arm, and he does not offer it again.

They are leaving Starmouth below them in the hollow before she breaks the silence.

"Won't—won't you smoke, please, Mr. Gwynne?"

"You are quite sure you do not object to it?" he asks, courteously, though a trifle coldly.

"Quite. I like it!"

Niel takes out a cigar and lights it. He is glad to do so. Perhaps the fragrant weed may soothe his disturbed mind, for it is troubled enough.

The path to Tidemouth by the road is rough and unpleasant walking, and before she has gone many yards Sadie regrets that she has not taken the aid of that strong arm; but as Niel does not suggest helping her she will not make a sign herself.

The silence between them grows so oppressive at last that Niel forces himself to break it. He makes some commonplace remark about the beauty of the night. Sadie answers him in the same tone, and then once again they relapse into silence.

The moon has risen, and is shining on the peaceful sea, leaving a long silver trail across the faintly moving waves, and vanishing into the dim grey shadows of the horizon. Bee and Philip are a long way on ahead, almost out of sight, and the other two are alone.

Niel has slackened his steps to suit Sadie's somewhat feeble ones. He longs to draw her slender hand through his arm and tell her to lean all her weight on him; but he cannot summon up courage to do it. There is something strange about her to-night; she has never seemed like this to him before.

Sadie looks wearily at the long road that, to her eyes, appears to get longer instead of shorter, and she wishes that she were back at the inn, or that Niel would go on and leave her alone. A curious feeling is in her throat, and tears are dangerously near her eyes. Niel notices that she is drooping more and more at each step, and he is just going to end the matter by simply taking her arm in his, when Sadie brings things to a climax by suddenly tripping, and before he can save her, falling on the ground.

"My dear—Sadie, you are not hurt?" he exclaims, in an agony of fear, as he raises her with gentle care. Sadie, shaken, nervous, tired out, leans against him, and trembles all over. She cannot control her voice to speak, and the two tears are stealing down her cheeks.

"You are not hurt? For Heaven's sake tell me, dear!" Niel asks again, huskily.

She shakes her head, and bending down his own, he sees the tears glistening. His heart is filled with unspeakable tenderness and great love for this frail, flower-like girl. He forgets all his disappointment and acute pain, and for one moment he realises that he is holding her in his arms—that she is his for that brief time.

"You are sure?" he asks, a third time, with a glance up and down, thinking what he shall do if she cannot walk.

"Quite," Sadie murmurs, faintly. "Only—only tired, and a little frightened."

Close beside them is a bit of broken wall, and he draws her up to this, and makes her sit down.

"Now we will have a long rest!" he says, cheerily.

But though he says this he does not offer to sit down himself, only stands looking at her bent head.

Sadie pulls the white fleecy shawl closer round her. She is none too warm now, and she misses the sense of protection and comfort that came to her as she stood for that moment in his strong arms.

By-and-by she moves her face.

"I wish you would go on, Mr. Gwynne."

"What! and leave you here?" he answers, quietly.

"I am not afraid," Sadie falters.

He makes no reply, but, folding his arms, takes a few turns up and down in front of her.

"No," he says once, as he rises to go, "we have lots of time. It is not ten o'clock, and I expect that Bee will scarcely have reached the inn yet."

He walks for another few moments.

"I shall not forgive myself in a hurry," he says abruptly, coming to another stop; "there must be no more of these long walks just yet."

"You are not to blame," Sadie manages to answer, faintly. "I—I would come."

Niel goes away a few steps, and stands looking out over the sea. His face is grave, and pained.

"He is thinking of her," Sadie says to herself. "I pity him; yes—yes, I pity him, for he must love her so."

The rest is doing her good, and the few tears she has shed have been even more beneficial. Still her heart is strangely sad, with a heavy sensation that seems new to her—not part of the old trouble.

"Mr. Gwynne," she calls softly; and, as Niel comes—"I am quite better now."

"I wish I could think so," Niel replies, with a faint smile. "Bee's wishes have been

father to her facts when she wrote me you were as well as could be imagined."

Sadie lifts her lovely eyes to his inquiringly.

"But she is eager, that is all, so I forgive her. I gathered, though, that a new doctor had come to prescribe for you—do you the best good of all."

"A new doctor!" Sadie repeats, wonderingly.

Niel checks a sigh.

"I mean your happiness, dear."

Sadie is still looking up at him.

"What happiness has come to me?" she murmurs, almost indistinctly.

Niel's heart stands still. What if he has been mistaken?

"I mean," he hurries on, agitatedly, "that Philip Brewer has—"

Sadie stops him with a wave of her hand.

"Mr. Brewer is my friend—nothing more."

"He does not love you? You—do not—but Niel got no farther."

Sadie's hands are trembling, and her heart is thrilling wildly.

"We—we must go on," she says, rising, and moving a step from him.

Niel can as yet scarcely realise the blessed truth that he has been mistaken, that Sadie is still free to be loved by him.

Free! Ah! but is she?

The moment has come when he can no longer deny his love. He feels he must know all, and at once; constraint is vanishing, and eager, passionate hope crowding in its place.

"Sadie?" he says, his voice hoarse with his emotion, "Wait, I wish to speak to you!"

The girl turns, and sees his face transfigured by his love, into almost beauty. Some indescribable influence surrounds her; she feels a throb of bliss in her heart, a delicious sense of new-found happiness and peace steal into her brain; and then—then she suddenly realises that it is love, that Niel loves her, and that she, through all these weary, dreadful weeks, has been drifting slowly and surely to the same end; that his gentleness, his tenderness, his goodness, have by force of contrast with that other's cruelty, been gradually riveted in her heart by bonds that until now she has not known were so strong.

Yes! For one moment she revels in the ecstasy of joy that comes to her; then Bee's words come back to her, and she remembers that the dark shadows of the past cling to the wings of her happiness. In that instant she shivers, and then Niel has caught her in his arms.

"Sadie, I see you understand, and you know there is no hope for me. Oh! my darling—my darling, if it could have been; let me hold you once in my arms before I release you for ever. I am too late—too late, Sadie. Will you give me one kiss, dear? He will forgive you when—"

Sadie clings to him; he has been watching her face, and as he sees the subtle change come over it as she thinks of the past. He misconstrues it to mean bitter disappointment to him.

"Niel," she whispers, "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I love you better than life, but that you can give me no hope, that another has the right. Merciful Heaven! Sadie, am I again mistaken? No, don't speak hastily; think what it means to me!"

She has lifted her face to him once more, and is looking him in the eyes.

"Niel, there is no other now!"

"Now," he repeats, huskily. "Then you have been wronged; your trouble has been this."

"Yes, my trouble has been this! Niel, listen to me. I—I have been nearly dragged down to death by him! He—oh! I cannot tell you, I cannot tell you!"

"That any man should dare to live and break your heart," he says, in a curiously set fashion. "Give me his name; he shall render an account of this—to me!"

Sadie's hands cling to his arm.

"Niel, dear," she murmurs, falteringly. "There is no need; he is dead!"

"Dead!"

Niel clasps her two hands in his.

"Oh! my poor Sadie, how blind I have been not to see you suffering, how cruel not to minister to it! Dead!—and he wronged you, Sadie; he treated you badly."

"Yes," she breathes, trembling at the memory of her last meeting with Jack, and his heartless treatment, "he nearly broke my heart."

Niel grinds his teeth.

"Oh! that I had known!" he cries.

"But you, too, have suffered. Bee has told me all. You loved her so well—that girl, Niel."

Loved, yes; but not her. I loved an ideal, a woman that did not exist, that I despaired of seeing till I met you. The truth opened my eyes, and when I knew Sybil to be what she was, she died from my memory."

"Then—then I have been wrong—"

"Did you think I could give one thought to her while I was with you? Oh! Sadie, if you knew how impossible that is! But tell me more—let me be your friend—if—if I—"

He stops, and Sadie colours faintly, then bends her head.

"I cannot listen to your love, till—till you know all, and—"

"I ask to know nothing!" he cries; "if you love me. Good heavens, if such were really true!"

His arms steal round her again.

"Tell me, Sadie, tell me, my sweet one, you care for me a little—just a little."

His tones are laden with tenderness.

She lifts her eyes to him.

"I love you, Niel," she whispers; "yes, I love you, but—"

"There is no but," he laughs, with sudden joy; and then he draws her close to his heart and rests his lips on hers with a sigh that comes from his very heart, as from the heart of one who has thirsted long, and now drinks.

"You love me—you love me. What have I done to deserve this happiness?" he says, after a pause, while he rains kisses on her eyes, brow, and hair. "No—do not speak. I will not let you tell me of the past. We bury the past to-night, my darling; we have both suffered, but now—now—"

"Niel," Sadie whispers, "will you really love me and yet know nothing?"

"Yes," he answers, smiling down at her; "I only want to know one thing, and that is that you love me."

And Niel's answer is so low and faint that he has to stoop to catch it; then his lips seek hers again, and the sound of the lapping waves sounds in their ears a harmonious melody to their happiness.

They are aroused suddenly by the sound of voices.

"It is Bee," Sadie cries, shyly, and she blushes deeply, drawing herself from his arms.

"Well," says Niel, audaciously, clasping her still tighter, "what of it?"

"She will—I mean—oh! Niel, dear, let me go, please."

"Give me one kiss then, and I will."

Sadie lifts her sweet lips to his—those lips that he has longed to touch with such a hopeless, despairing longing.

"Ah! my darling!" he says, passionately and earnestly; "my own sweet love, may Heaven bless you and protect you always."

And then he draws her hand through his arm, and they are walking slowly and sedately along the rough path when Bee and Philip Brewer turn the corner and come upon them.

"We thought you were lost!" Bee declares, brightly, "or that Sadie had broken down altogether."

"She was very tired, and has been resting," Niel answers, quickly, trying to keep his absurd joy from ringing in his voice.

Sadie clings to him just a little. Resting! ah! indeed, that she has. Who but herself can tell the exquisite relief and happiness of

resting in his arms, close to his strong, brave heart.

"I am not tired now," is all she says, but there is such a subtle change in her tones that both Philip and Bee notice it.

"Can it be?" thinks the pretty, little widow, with a flutter of excitement, and Philip Brewer feels a sudden thrill of pleasure.

"If these two come together," he said to himself, "it will be the first step to my far-off happiness, for I could never touch happiness while I knew this girl was miserable. She must love him; Niel Gwynne is the sort of man a good woman, such as she is, must love. It was not the real love she gave to Jack. Her girlish sentiment was awakened; he was a handsome young fellow, a perfect hero to a school-girl, but when she found him out, as find him out she did, all that died away, and she is all the more ready to love deeply and truly for her one wretched experience."

Which shows Mr. Brewer to be not entirely ignorant of the workings of a young girl's mind. He is thinking this as they all stroll back to the inn, a merry party in the moonlight.

Sadie refuses to let them run on and fetch her a cart.

"I can walk quite well," she says, with a laugh that sounds like music in their ears. "I—I would much rather walk!"

And Niel presses the tiny hand that is slipped through his-arm, so tight that he almost hurts her. He understands her; she is happy with him, and her fatigue is gone.

"Well, I don't know what anybody else can do, but I can eat some supper!" cries Bee, as they come in sight of their destination.

And to this there is a unanimous assent.

Bee and Philip pass in through the low, old-fashioned door first, and Sadie looks up into Niel's face half wistfully, half shyly.

"Niel," she says, softly, "I want you to think of what I said, dear. I—I am ready to tell you all my miserable story, and—"

"And I refuse to hear it," Niel says, again clasping her two hands in his, and kissing first one and then the other; "for I know it would give you pain, my darling, would it not?"

Sadie grows a shade paler.

"Yes—yes," she answers, hurriedly, as the memory of all she has endured comes back to her. "It would give me pain; still, Niel dear, I am ready to bear that to—"

He interrupts her once more.

"No," he says with decision. "I will not have it. I want no shadow to fall upon our great happiness just now, Sadie; and so we bury the past to-night, and, please Heaven, you will soon learn to forget it altogether!"

"If I am with you, that will not be very difficult," the girl says, with strong emotion, and then she loosens her hands from his and turns indoors.

She goes upstairs, as in a dream, and enters the bedroom where she has spent so many weary, miserable moments, and there she comes upon Bee, who is looking out of the window.

Sadie hesitates; in her amazement and sudden ecstasy of joy she has forgotten Bee, and now she has to tell her secret; and she wonders, hurriedly and vaguely, if Bee will mind, for she knows what the bond is that binds the brother and sister together. But she is not left long in doubt.

Hearing her footstep Bee turns and flies across to her, flinging her arms about her.

"Sadie," she asks, in an agitated whisper, "am I right? Isn't there something you want to tell me? Yes, yes, I know there is; and do you know, Sadie, I think I can guess what is in into the bargain?"

Sadie gazes earnestly into the pretty little face, her own tinged with a lovely touch of red.

"And—and do you mind, Bee?" she asks. Bee gives her a hug that nearly chokes her.

"Mind—darling!" she ejaculates; "why, how could I? Don't I love you with all my heart after Niel? And now I must love you as much as him, because you will belong to him

and be my sister. Oh! Sadie, I am so glad, so very, very glad, for I guessed Niel's secret, oh! a long time ago, and I know he has been fretting tremendously about you."

Sadie submits to be kissed, and returns the kiss with interest.

"But Bee," she says, with some hesitation, "you didn't speak like this when we were on the sands after dinner. You told me that Niel was frotting over—"

"Over Sybil Warner," Bee finishes, coolly; "yes, so I did, I remember now. Don't you think I am a very clever diplomatist, Sa die?"

Sadie looks inquiringly.

"I mean when I woke you up with a little bit of jealousy about Sybil?"

"Did you do that on purpose, Bee?"

Sadie's voice is full of incredulity.

Bee confesses boldly.

"Of course I did," she says. "I saw how the land lay, and I was determined to bring things to a crisis at once and without any further delay, and I must say," observes the dainty little matron, "that I take great credit to myself for what I have done."

"You are a wicked schemer," Sadie retorts, with a laugh and a blush, then nestling close to the girl she goes on; "but I will not scold you, Bee, for I am too happy—yes, much too happy, to think or say an unkind thing tonight!"

Then they sit down by the open window, and holding each other's hands gaze over the lovely moonlit sea in silence.

Bee is watching Sadie's face, across which the varying emotions flit, making it more beautiful with each new and gentle expression, but suddenly the sweet contentment goes, and a look of fear, of dread, comes instead.

"Bee," Sadie says, tightening her clasp on her new sister's hand, "am I too happy, dear—will it last? I am so frightened, so fearful that something will come to crush it all—that I am only given this taste of peace and delight to torment me more when it is gone, I—"

"Why, you silly child, what should come? You are nervous and tired with your long walk. Wait till the morning comes, Miss Sadie, and you won't ask these sort of questions. Listen, there is Niel calling! Give me a kiss, darling; we must go down. Now don't look so solemn; I won't have it, Sadie!"

And then, as they go slowly downstairs, Bee quotes, with a pretty air of consequence, these lines of Swinburne:—

"We are in love's land to-day,

Where shall we go?

Love, shall we start or stay?

Or sail or row?

There's many a wind and way,

And never a May but May;

We are in love's hand to-day;

Where shall we go?"

"Our lan' wind is the breath

Of sorrows kissed to death,

And joys that were.

Our ballast is a rose,

Our way lies where God knows,

And love knows where;

We are in love's hand to-day."

"And being in love's hand," she says, at the end, "don't you think we may as well try and get rid of all sorts of gloomy thoughts, eh? Oh! you must not laugh at me, Sadie; I am the most sentimental person in the world, as by this time I should think you had found out."

And, having come to the supper-room, with these remarks Bee rushes up to her brother, and flings herself into his arms.

"Mr. Brewer will forgive me, I am sure," she says, as she wipes away two tears, and turns round with a smile.

And Philip, who is whispering some words of congratulation to Sadie—words that come from his heart—looks round at her, and feels a sudden and strange desire to wipe away those tears, not only now, but always.

(To be continued.)

TRUE AS THE STARS.

CHAPTER I. THE PROMISE.

"RHODA, stop one instant; I want to tell you something," and Captain Yelverton looked down into the girl's lovely, hesitating eyes with a gleam of passionate tenderness in his own. Honour tried to hold him back, and whispered in his ear of broken promises and tarnished faith, of another girl to whom his word was pledged, of long years of disappointment he was preparing for one who loved him with a mother's undying affection, of the ruin and the anguish he was heaping up for others whilst thinking only of pleasure for himself; but inclination held him tightly in her never-fleaching grasp, and he was a man always more accustomed to drink the nearest draught of joy than to wait for the chance of a better one at a distance.

"I can't stop; aunt will be expecting me—the others have gone on," Rhoda said shyly, whilst a blush like a wild rose coloured her cheeks, and her long lashes drooped on her velvet cheeks.

"So much the better," he said quickly, as he stood before her on the narrow path, so as completely to block her way. Then there was a pause, whilst the girl's heart throbbed like that of a frightened child, and even the strong, impetuous man had a pang of unaccustomed compunction. The birds were singing joyfully in the dense thicket of tender green; the primroses were pressing their innocent faces through the briars at his feet like children struggling unconsciously against the sorrows and the difficulties of a world they cannot understand; and all the joy and the beauty of spring seemed to be embodied in the girl before him. He was not a man given to hesitation where his own wishes were strong, but in a flash he saw the future like an ugly dream. Not as he had pictured it in his careless, hopeful fashion, but dull, and cold, and dreary, with all the glory and the happiness left behind at the first step.

Then a voice which he hated cried, "Miss Macdonald! Where are you? Mrs. Sumner is wondering where you are," and that decided him.

A fierce jealousy blazed like fire in his reckless heart, and, careless of consequences, he caught her little trembling hands in his, and said, his voice husky with intense eagerness, his black eyes looking straight into hers, "You belong to me more than to any of them, don't you, darling? There's not one of them that appreciates you properly. I've got to be off to-morrow."

A shade came over her face like a cloud on an April sky, and he saw it, and his heart leapt within his breast. "But I'm coming back, and I want you to give me a promise."

"Miss Macdonald!" cried that other voice, as steps came nearer and nearer, and Captain Yelverton scowled impatiently.

"Curse the fellow!" he muttered, then his voice softened again, like his eyes.

"I must go," said Rhoda, trembling as she tried to drag her hands away.

"You shall, directly you're promised," a great eagerness flushing his dark face. "Only promise to meet me at Old Man's Point at ten o'clock in the morning—the tide will just suit then—this day three weeks. Promise!"

"I can't!" her eyes opening wide in dismay.

"You must. Can't you trust me?" in bitter reproach. "Do you want to drag out the rest of your life with these people? Do you want to grow old before you are young? Do you want never to know what happiness is till your estimable aunt thinks it time to take herself off?"

"No," low and distinct, with a little shiver, "but I don't want to do anything wrong," and the corners of her mouth quivered.

"Wrong! Absurd!" his eyes flashing with all the scorn of a man of the world for a

child's superstitious reverence for the things he most despises. "You were meant to be happy and loved. Come to me, and you shall be both!"

"Miss Macdonald!" again came the warning cry, but the owner of the voice had evidently taken a wrong turn, and was getting more deeply involved in the wood.

"Staveley is getting fogged, as usual," said Captain Yelverton, with a short laugh. "You know that he likes your little finger a thousand times better than Miss Sumner's whole substantial person. She doesn't see it as yet, but when she finds it out, don't you think you had better be out of the way?"

"I hate him!" her cheeks flushing hotly. "He belongs to Virginia. He has nothing on earth to do with me."

"Nothing to do with you, when he thinks of no one else? Didn't he want to give those flowers to-day to you instead of to Miss Sumner? Don't his horrid little eyes follow you wherever you go, and doesn't he hate me like poison because, because—you know why?" with a smile curling the tips of his dark moustache. "And will it be pleasant for you to be like a thorn in your cousin's side? Do you wish to stop a marriage on which all their hearts are set?"

"No, no; of course not," indignantly.

"Then come away. Staveley will never marry Virginia so long as you are under the same roof with her. Come for her sake—for your own—for mine."

A few more words were said, passionate and overwhelming. A hasty promise was given, which bound her she scarcely knew to what, and then she took her hands away and fled, her heart beating almost to suffocation, her whole frame shaking with wondrous fear and delight. He loved her—Douglas Yelverton, the handsomest man in the whole corps of cavalry stationed in Porthampton, the beau ideal of a lover, for whom all the best-looking girls of the neighbourhood were sighing in vain! Oh! how kind Heaven had been to her to send her such joy as this! And why had it come to her? Her cousins had always told her that she was too small and insignificant to attract any attention, and she had believed the unpleasant assertion to be too painfully true. Certainly, Mason, the housemaid, when pinning her sash that very day, had blurted out, with her mouth half full of pins, "You'll take the shine out of them all some day, miss, see if you don't," but she had only laughed, and thought that Mason was really getting fond of her, for people generally admire those they like the most.

On she sped, lightfooted as a greyhound, and in her haste and confusion cannoned up against a spruce young man with straw-coloured hair and almost white moustache.

"Ah! here you are!" he exclaimed, as soon as he had resettled his glass in his eye, which had been jolted out of it by the shock of the violent contact. "I've been looking for you everywhere, and the old lady's tearing her hair with impatience."

"I am so sorry," coming down with a run from the heights of her rapture, and remembering with a pang that her aunt could be uncommonly nasty when cross, "I—I couldn't come before."

"Ah! you lost your way. I knew you did," triumphantly. "Mrs. Sumner would have it that you were flirting with Yelverton, but I told her you were one of the right sort, and not like the garrison hacks, always running after a red coat. There they are!" pointing to where a large yellow carriage was waiting, with a pair of unwieldy bays, champing their bits. "I've found the lost babe in the wood," running forward, whilst Rhoda, overcome by her fears, insensibly slackened her pace.

Mrs. Sumner was a large woman, with strongly marked features, who carried herself with an air as if she thought she was a second Diana.

She was good-looking to a certain extent, but timid people shrank from her as a small yawl might if an ironclad were bearing down

upon her. Her temper was uncertain, and those who knew her best kept out of her way if they could when the danger signal was flying, as Harry called it irreverently.

It was flying now, for her cheeks were nearly purple, but Rhoda had a tiny hope that she might escape a storm of reproaches under the nose of Mr. Staveley, and for once in her life was thankful for his presence.

Virginia was an exact replica of her mother, on rather a smaller scale, and her eyes flashed ominously under the brim of her towering hat.

"Where's Captain Yelverton?" she asked, immediately, not because she had an intense interest in that fascinating officer, but because she was desperately afraid lest her young cousin had been flattered by his attentions.

Rhoda cast a hurried glance over her shoulder, and not seeing a sign of him in any direction, said, hesitatingly.—

"I don't know."

Mrs. Sumner snapped out,—

"Get in; we can't wait here for ever," which made her spring into the carriage at one bound, followed by Mr. Staveley, who smiled deprecatingly at his betrothed.

The coachman flicked his whip, the horses started forward, and the picnic in Ashleigh Woods, to which Rhoda had been looking forward for six long weeks, was over and done with!

Leaning back against the well-padded cushions of the carriage she felt dazed and bewildered, as if she had placed herself on what she had taken for a firm rock, and awoke to find herself floating down some rushing stream on the way to a tempest-tossed ocean. Never had she felt so entirely alone as now, with the frowning face of her aunt opposite to her, and another girl's lover by her side.

She knew that he was watching her from under his light eyelashes, but the knowledge only made her feel uncomfortable, as she was sure that even those stolen glances were grudged her by her cousin, and that presently when she reached home the pent-up storm would burst over her unprotected head.

Oh! for a mother, on whose loving breast she could sob out all her griefs and longings, her fears, her hopes, her timid dreams of joy, and have in return the wise and tender counsel which she needed so terribly!

"Oh! for the touch of a vanished hand
And the sound of a voice that is still!"

Who has not felt the longing conveyed in those simple words, when there is no longer a chance of an answer, however loud the cry?

Rhoda Macdonald's mother had died long years ago, and her father, Colonel Sir Donald Macdonald, had married a second time; but she felt like a desolate orphan, for she had never seen her stepmother, and her father had been for the last ten years in India.

Mrs. Sumner was delighted to undertake the charge of her brother's little girl in exchange for a handsome income; but when the child threatened to grow up beauty and rival the charms of her own daughters, her friendly feeling of mitigated compassion changed into one of almost unmitigated dislike. She did not beat her, or starve her, or dress her up in rags like a typical unkind aunt in a book, but she made a firm resolution to keep her as much in the background as possible; and, strange to say, directly Mrs. Sumner made this secret resolution it was as if she had announced it publicly with a loud flourish of trumpets, and the whole neighbourhood had risen up in protest against it.

The most pressing invitations came to "her charming niece" from all sides, and as these invitations were artfully worded, and a "friendly cup of tea" in pen-and-ink turned into a carpet dance with plenty of military cavaliers, Rhoda contrived to get quite her fair share of gaiety.

She was as fresh and innocent as a white rosebud bathed in dew, but an eager hand was stretched to gather it, and the spotless petals ran a chance of being soiled before the rose

had attained its first full bloom. But there are angels to watch over a child's sweet innocence as over every sparrow that falls; and without father or mother to watch or to guide Rhoda may still go on her way through the chances and changes of life, through the troubles and pleasures that fall to most of us, and keep her pure, frank nature to the end.

"You took a long time to find Rhoda?" said Virginia, looking severely across at her lover, who kept edging away from the very sharp points of her square parasol which came every now and then in close proximity to his nose.

"I know I did," with an amused smile. "Miss Macdonald and I were having a delightful game of hide-and-seek in the wood."

"Then she ought to be ashamed of herself," said Mrs. Sumner, just as if she were firing off a forty-pounder. "Rhoda, do you hear?"

Rhoda started, and said, with an air of bewilderment,—

"What is it, aunt? I didn't hear."

"Playing hide-and-seek at your age! Do please remember that you are not a child!"

"Mr. Staveley was joking," looking at him with resentful eyes, as she detected a covert smile on his thin lips. "I never played hide-and-seek with him in my life—and I never shall."

"Don't you be too sure," he said, in a whisper, as the carriage drew up at the door of Sumner Lodge, and he prepared to help her out.

The words were lightly spoken, but they were meant to convey a warning and a prophecy, and the girl's cheeks flamed like a sunset.

CHAPTER II.

DINNER UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

A REVOLVER in the hand of a child of three years old is scarcely more likely to bring destruction with it than a young, impulsive heart, with throbbing pulses and passionate hopes, surrounded by chilling influences.

Thrown back on itself, with every hope repressed like tightly condensed gas, it is much given to explosion. Sooner or later an explosion is sure to come.

Rhoda Macdonald was in a very unpleasant position, as Captain Yelverton had promptly discovered, and a really unselfish pity had added fuel to a too evidently selfish love.

His heart was full of compassion mixed with intense tenderness, as he stood under the red-thorn tree just where she had left him deep in thought.

She was so young, so fresh, so divinely innocent, so different from the fast, frivolous, artificial, coquettish women with whom he had been constantly thrown during the last few years.

Her deep, trustful eyes had no baleful fire in them; they were pure as those of an infant, from whom the sins and the sorrows of the world have been hidden by its own guilelessness; but they could speak of love as deep and true as that which flashed from Lady Diana Stuart's, when she looked on the handsome face of Douglas Yelverton, Captain in the Royal Blue Lancers.

Lady Di had caught him after a fashion of her own, and he found himself proposing to her, when matrimony was the last port into which he meant to drift. And now in his turn, before he was bound hand and foot, he turned and caught a fluttering fly in his web, to which he promptly set to work to act the part of a spider.

The fly scarcely knew if it was caught or not, and thought it was delightful to be prised and sought after, but the web was one from which escape was difficult, and the outside gate bore the inscription which has struck a chill to many hearts:

"Too late!"

Captain Yelverton clenched his hand and muttered,—

"I can't let her go! If I do, that cad, Staveley, will have her, and her life will be one long purgatory!"

Then he descended the hill with rapid strides, and made his way to the little inn, "The Three Lobsters," where his dog-cart was waiting for him.

A man with a noble, high-bred face, and tall, well-proportioned figure, was lounging in the doorway, smoking a tiny cigarette.

"Bester late than never, Yel!" he called out. "I was just thinking of having Ashleigh Woods searched to see what had become of you!"

"All very well, but I've scarcely been a moment!" laughing slightly. "Where's the cart? Bring it round and look sharp (to the ostler). I must have something to drink; my throat's as dry as a whistle!" disappearing inside.

A few minutes later the two were seated in the cart, and bowling down the road as fast as Captain Yelverton's high-stepping mare, "Brown Bess," could take them.

After an interval, spent in unquiet reflection, Frank Dorner broke the silence, as he threw away the end of his cigarette.

"Confess, Yel," he said, looking round at his brother officer. "It was that little girl from Sumner Lodge that kept you. I don't believe anything else would have made you run the risk of being late to-night!"

"She's a child, I tell you, and I was always devoted to young 'uns," said the other, with a half-conscious smile. "Nothing I like better than to study innocence in the germ!"

"An odd sort of study, which does away with it entirely," said Dorner drily. "Let her alone, Yel; I've a fancy that she's miles too good for fellows like you or me."

"A thousand times too good, and that's why I can't give her up," drawing a deep breath. "If ever an angel stepped on earth Rhoda Macdonald is one."

"But you know you would feel uncommonly awkward walking arm-in-arm with an angel!" remarked Frank, with a quiet smile. "A husband and wife ought to be on the same level, or else one of your backs will break with stooping. By Jove! I forgot Lady D!"

"I wish I could," muttered Yelverton under his dark moustaches, giving the mare an ugly cut over the head which made her plunge and kick out in wild surprise, whilst the cart swayed from one hedge to another, and seemed every moment on the point of overturning its occupants on to the branches of the small trees which bordered the road on either side.

Conversation was impossible, so the subject dropped, and Dorner forgot all about the little girl at Sumner Lodge long before they drew up at the barracks in Porthampton.

Not so Captain Yelverton, who was more silent than usual at the regimental dinner given that night by the officers of the Blue Lancers to a popular hero of the day.

His friends voted him "slow," whilst strangers who had heard of his great popularity in social circles considered that his merits had been fearfully overrated.

Perhaps they would not have judged him so harshly if they had known that often, instead of the masculine faces opposite to him with hairy appendages of moustaches or whisker, he saw a girl's sweet face, with cherry lips and tawny eyes, framed in a cloud of golden hair, and a smile like the smile of the spring.

That night he went to bed with the firm resolution to give up the dream that seemed the sweetest of his life, and to leave the rosebud to bloom unmolested on its branch; but the next morning his scruples had gone like the darkness, and he would as soon have thought of throwing up his commission as Rhoda Macdonald's love.

Meanwhile, the girl whose fate was tottering in the balance, and disturbing the tranquillity of more than one heart in the cavalry barracks at Porthampton, had been properly scolded and called to account for being too pretty and attractive.

The night of the piano she retired to her room in tears, and vowed she would have no dinner.

Mrs. Sumner's language had been, to say the least, extremely forcible; and not content with accusations of flirting and bold behaviour such as made Rhoda hot and cold with disgust—although she knew that she had done nothing to merit them—she raked up an old story to the discredit of an uncle who had behaved rather badly in his youth, and was supposed to have made his native land too hot to hold him.

Whenever Rhoda was in disgrace this uncle was thrown at her head, and always availed to crush her spirit of defiance. There was a mysterious vagueness about his misdemeanours which added considerably to the effect, as every sin in the catalogue could be ascribed to him when nobody was there who knew anything of the facts of the case.

"What can we expect of the niece of a man who for all I know committed murder, and fled Heaven knows where, to hide his blood-stained hands? Yes, Rhoda; you've no reason to be so mightily proud of your family. One black sheep contaminates the whole, and ought to have thought twice before admitting you into this innocent home!"

"I never asked you to take me," raising her small head proudly. "Oh! let me go to school. For Heaven's sake, let me go to school! Just for a year or so, and then perhaps my father will come home, and you'll be rid of me for ever!"

"Not if I know it. I trust I know my duty rather better than that. A finishing school is, in my opinion, a mere hot bed of silly sentimentalism, gossip, and flirtation," said Mrs. Sumner with infinite contempt, crushing at one fell blow all the superior establishments at which most of the young ladies of the neighbourhood had received their extra superfine polish. "And from what I've seen of you, my dear, I find that the closer I can keep you under my own eye the better. With a girl I could trust I might act differently. Now go to your room, and Mason shall bring you your dinner. It would be well for you to eat it in solitude."

"I won't eat it at all," cried Rhoda passionately, her poor young heart swelling with indignation. "I'd rather starve in a garret than live under a roof where I'm not welcome. Oh! I pray Heaven that I mayn't be here much longer!" and then she rushed upstairs and locked herself in her own room.

As soon as she was alone, with no disdainful eyes to catch her, she flung herself down upon her bed and a torrent of tears poured down her cheeks on to the white counterpane, whilst a convulsive sob shook her slight frame from head to foot.

What had she done to be treated so scornfully? Nothing; absolutely nothing! She had made Edward Staveley sulky by refusing to go with him in search of primroses; she had stood close to the rector's side during the earlier part of the day; and when Captain Yelverton had suddenly appeared after luncheon she had hidden herself behind her aunt in a fit of shyness. Was it her fault that he spied her out when she was accidentally separated from the others, and on pretence of finding blue bells had led her far away into the woods, and refused to let her go till she had given a promise which pledged her to the scarcely known what? Ah! what would he say if he saw her now?

There was a knock at the door. Mason from the outside begged her to have some dinner, but she sternly refused.

How could she be supposed to have an appetite when she had been so shamefully insulted and disgraced? She buried her face still deeper in the counterpane, and at last sobbed herself to sleep like a tired child. It had been a long, exhausting day, bright with the radiance of love; dark with the dull, cold blight of hate. The one had followed close on the heels of the other, till the girl felt like a shuttlecock tossed from hand to hand.

As she slept she dreamt of Captain Yelverton. His handsome face was close to hers, his soft voice was whispering in her ears, his arms were thrown round her. She was lifted off her feet; he was carrying her away. In vain she struggled to free herself; in vain she cried for help, he only answered her entreaties with a maddening smile—her struggles by a still closer clasp.

She woke up, her heart beating as if it would burst; tears still wet upon her lashes, and with a sense of fright and horror upon her that made her long for Mason or anybody else to speak a few common place words to.

Something fell at her feet on the carpet. She stared at it, and now discovered it was a small stone, probably picked out of the gravel path. She ran to the window, naturally concluding that some friendly hand had thrown it in. The blood rushed to her cheeks as she thought of Captain Yelverton, though she knew that he was miles away dining at mess, and that even had he been down there on the lawn he could not have guessed by intuition which was her window amongst more than a score.

Alas! when her blushing face appeared framed in the long trails of a starry clematis she saw no one but Edward Staveley, who gesticulated wildly, and called out in a hoarse whisper,

"I knew you must be starving. This is all I could prig from dessert. Be quick and catch!"

Almost before she could stretch out her hand a golden ball came flying over her shoulder, another hit her on the chest, a third nearly went in her eye. It was no use to think of a dignified refusal. The sight of the first orange made her aware that she was maddeningly thirsty, and even if she made an appeal to her pride, and summoned sufficient resolution to throw them back, it would only degenerate into a game of ball, and wasn't that as bad as hide-and-seek? Whilst she was hesitating he called out again,

"Look out—catch them, or they will break!" and her hands went out obediently to meet a strange-looking packet with long ends douting behind it. "Keep it. Don't stop another minute. Mind you are kinder the next time we meet!"

The words gave her an uncomfortable feeling, but when the packet proved to be some most refined coco-nut biscuits, tied up in a superfine cambric pocket-handkerchief, gratinade and honey swallowed up all other feelings, and she ate them with the eagerness of a young savage.

When she had quite finished, and there was nothing left but three yellow skins, a few pips and a pocket-handkerchief, she almost wished that she had stood on her dignity and dissembled her hunger; but of all things in the world hunger is the frankest, and most apt to override all conventionalities; and she would have found it impossible to hide it from Mr. Staveley without a reckless plunge into falsehood, which probably would have been thrown away after all. So she made the best of a bad job, hid the skins of the oranges behind the Japanese screen in the grate, folded up the handkerchief with its compromising monogram and crest in the corner, and put it in her drawer; and after a wretched evening went to bed with a smile on her lips as she thought if Virginia only knew!

CHAPTER III.

THE FATAL STEP.

The three weeks were nearly over; in fact, the very next morning was the one on which Rhoda Macdonald was to keep her fatal promise. She was sitting in the drawing-room working hard and very silently at a pair of slippers which she meant to present to her cousin Amy on her birthday.

The crimson colour of the slipper contrasted well with the soft grey hue of her dress,

and there was someone in the room who, although apparently fully occupied in turning over his *fiancée's* pages, could scarcely keep his eyes off the gold-brown head, drooping like a hare-bell over the needle and thread.

"What a bother!" she exclaimed suddenly, in the midst of one of Schumann's softest passages. "I shan't have enough gold braid, and I set my heart on finishing this to-day."

"What does it matter?" said Virginia, impatiently. "You can write to Nicholls by post, and I daresay you will get it by to-morrow evening."

"What do you want? Gold braid, did you say? Like this?" and Edward Staveley picked up a scrap from the carpet. "How much?"

"Only two or three yards, but I can't get an inch," with disconsolately raised eyebrows.

"Turn over, Edward," cried Virginia.

In his hurry he made a dart at the page, and upset the music book with a clatter on the keys.

"It's all your fault for interrupting," with an angry glance at her cousin.

"I didn't speak to either of you—only to myself."

"Nonsense! As if you could talk without wishing someone to answer you."

"Depends on the someone."

"I hate such equivocating stuff. You knew who was in the room, and you spoke to Edward, of course."

"I knew who was in the room," drawing up her long, perfectly-rounded throat, "and of course I spoke to neither."

The luncheon bell came as a welcome interruption, and Virginia soon forgot everything else in discussing an invitation to one of the forts in the Isle of Wight.

"So fortunate that Amy is coming home to-night," said Mrs. Sumner, with a satisfied smile, as she helped herself to mint sauce. "Colonel Arkwright made me promise to bring two."

"Yes, and Amy is sure to enjoy it," quietly ignoring her cousin, though she knew her to be included in the Colonel's invitation. "Let me see, we go over to Ryde by the twelve o'clock boat, and they've chartered another to bring us home in the small hours. Rhoda, you will have to take care of papa."

The colour rushed into the girl's face as Mr. Staveley remembered long afterwards, when every minutest particular of that and the subsequent day was placed under microscopic examination; but she answered nothing, whilst he said, in an almost voiceless whisper,

"Happy Mr. Sumner!"
She pretended not to hear, as she bent over her plate, and as soon as luncheon was over slipped out into the garden and kept out of sight till she heard the sound of his horse's hoofs.

Then she emerged, and was told to dress herself quickly, as she was to go and pay visits with her aunt and cousin.

During the drive she sat as quiet as a mouse on the back seat of the barouche, for her mind was oppressed by a vague fear of the morrow.

Captain Yelverton's manner was so serious, he seemed so passionately eager to make her promise to meet him; he mentioned his boat as if she were actually to go in it alone with him.

The others would all be out, there would be no one to miss her, but she must be sure to be back for luncheon, or else the servants would wonder where she was, and tell Mrs. Sumner of her absence.

"Rhoda, are you dreaming?" inquired Virginia, sharply. "Here we are, and you seem inclined to sit there for ever!"

Rhoda started, and looked confused.

"Back again? Why I thought we were miles away!"

"You must have had something very interesting to think of," said Virginia, as they passed through the hall. "What's that?"

looking at a small parcel done up in white paper lying on the table.

"A parcel for Miss Macdonald. Mr. Staveley left it," said Thompson the butler, as he opened the baize door which led into the passage.

"For me?" exclaimed Rhoda, in surprise, catching it up and opening it. "The gold braid, I declare. Well, that is good-natured of him!"

Virginia tore it out of her hand, and examined the paper closely as if to see if there were any writing on it.

"I never heard of such a thing in my life! How ridiculous! He must have ridden straight there and back without stopping. He might have had more consideration for his horse at least, if for nothing else."

"Look at the water. You've upset the primroses!" cried Rhoda, quickly picking up a vase which was rolling dangerously near the edge of the table.

"Oh! quick, a cloth. My dress will be quite spoilt. Here, give me your handkerchief!"

Rhoda put her hand into her pocket and pulled out a large white handkerchief, and began rubbing her cousin's light cashmere with kindly zeal.

"I don't think it will stain," she said, cheerfully, "It's coming out beautifully."

Suddenly the skirt was wrenched from her, a hand was laid violently on her shoulder, and she was dragged helter-skelter into the library.

The door was shut violently behind her, and she found herself face to face with Virginia, who was glaring at her with eyes ablaze with rage.

"You toad, you viper, you treacherous little sneak!" she cried, stamping her foot, half mad with rage. "Oh, don't pretend to look so innocent with that handkerchief in your hand; it condemns you at once. Tell me this instant where and how you got it. Did you steal it from him as you are stealing him from me? Was it given you as a love-token?"

A light dawned through Rhoda's utter bewilderment. She had put Mr. Staveley's handkerchief into her pocket in order to return it to him if she had the opportunity. The opportunity never came, so it rested there forgotten, and came out now, with its crest and monogram plainly visible, to cover her with humiliation.

How could she tell of the episode with the oranges? Virginia would be sure to magnify it into a secret rendezvous, and it was so disgusting to be supposed to do anything underneath.

"Can't you speak? Have you lost your tongue? Answer me at once!" cried Miss Sumner, literally shaking with rage, from her high-crowned hat to her high-heeled shoes.

"I had forgotten all about it. It was wrapped round something I once—I meant to give it back," she said, hesitatingly.

"Some things he gave to you? So you've been receiving presents from him? Bah! it makes me sick!"

"I never did such a thing in my life!" her tawny eyes flashing in indignant defiance. "I hate him! I hate him!"

"You can't take me in, you little hypocrite! I suspected that something was going on long ago; I'm not as blind as a bat; but listen," her voice growing hoarse with the intense thrill of earnestness of concentrated rage, her forefinger raised as if to accentuate the warning. "I'm not going to give him up. I've not many people to care for me—but he does—he has told me so a thousand times, and if you attempt to get in my way you had better take care. I'd do anything on earth to keep him from you!"

"You needn't trouble yourself!" her face white and disdainful. "I wouldn't have him if he had a million a year!"

"It's easy to talk!" with a bitter sneer. "You shan't have him, that I swear! Rather than he—he should be your husband, I would kill you! I would—I mean it! Steal him

from me if you dare, and the grave shall be your bridal-bed! Now go. I hate the sight of you!"

She pushed Rhoda towards the door, and the girl, with one swift look up into her stern face, stepped out through the hall into the road.

Her pretty lips were closely pressed together; her brows were drawn in a level line across the creamy whiteness of her forehead; her hand tightly clenched; her chest heaving.

Rhoda Macdonald was just in that condition of mind which generally precedes a dread catastrophe, and there seemed to be no angel near to save her.

With fast steps she made her way along the road to Port Hampton, not knowing in the least where her feet were taking her. Only anywhere—anywhere, out of her only home!

A man, looking like an officer's servant, stared hard at the little, hurrying figure, passed, then turned on his heel and went up to her.

"Miss Macdonald, I believe?" he said, touching his hat.

Rhoda looked up at him with startled eyes, and before she had time to speak a letter was in her hand, and he was gone.

She did not know Captain Yelverton's writing, but she was sure the letter was from him, and her poor, troubled heart gave a bound of joy. There was somebody in the world who still cared for her who never thought an unworthy thought concerning her!

She turned aside from the public road, and entering a little wood sat down on the stump of a once gigantic oak, and devoured the few lines in which Douglas Yelverton spoke out all the mad love with which his heart was bursting, and conjured her to be his for ever and ever.

He swore on his honour that she should never repeat it; and she believed him implicitly. How could she be sorry to turn her back on a house where she had been so insulted and disgraced? She would go gladly and joyfully, without a scruple or a qualm.

Surely if her mother were alive she would say she was right; if her father, in that distant land, cared a straw what became of her, surely he would be glad that she was Douglas Yelverton's wife.

A wife? The crimson colour rushed into her soft cheeks. She put the thought from her hastily, in maidenly alarm; but it must be sweet to have a loving voice always in her ears—a strong arm always ready to protect her. Ah! how she had sighed for sympathy, and now she would have it in richest abundance.

It was nearly the dinner-hour by the time she reached the Lodge, but she made an excuse and said she would not change her dress. She sat opposite to Virginia at the table, but she was so pre-occupied that she forgot to be uncomfortable.

Virginia studied the small white face, and could not make anything of its expression.

The large grave eyes were intensely thoughtful, but there was not a trace of shame in their downward glances, and every now and then, to her disgust, she caught a tremulous smile upon the sweet mouth.

"Impudent little wretch! I believe she is laughing at me!" she said to herself in rage. "I will give a piece of my mind to Edward, to-morrow, as sure as my name is Virginia!"

Amy Sumner, a fine, good-natured looking girl, with fat cheeks and prominent eyes, had arrived shortly after the quarrel in the library. Knowing nothing of what had happened, she prattled away the whole evening, whilst Rhoda sat quietly stitching at the slipper, sewing on Mr. Staveley's gold braid in an elaborate pattern.

"Come, child, don't work yourself to death," said Amy, good-naturedly. "As I'm going to spend my birthday out, you may revenge yourself by not giving me any present till the next day."

"I've set my heart on finishing it," Rhoda

said quietly, "but I'm afraid I must leave you to have them made up for yourself."

"Why, of course. I only ask you to work them. Leave off, and play to me," taking the slipper out of the girl's small hand.

It was no use to struggle with the muscular Amy. A dog might as well have engaged with an elephant; so Rhoda assented to the arrangement at once, and sat down to the piano. The piano had a voice that night for her poor restless heart. Whether the notes were wild and passionate, or soft and gentle, it was always Douglas Yelverton who was speaking to her; and it seemed to lull all her anxieties to rest. How could she grieve for anything when she would be safe with him to-morrow?

Late that night she put into a little bag all the things she was fondest of, except a small diamond star which had belonged to her mother, and which she thought she would like to wear on her wedding-day.

How strange it seemed for no one to know! Mason asked if she were going to the party at the fort, when she came downstairs in her white gown with the diamonds in her collar.

"No, but Miss Rhoda has made herself smart because it is my birthday," said Amy, as Rhoda put up her face and gave her a kiss with her best wishes. "Come into the green-house after breakfast and I'll pick you a button-hole of Marshal Niel roses."

The breakfast took a longer time than usual, and Amy, knowing no reason for haste, dawdled tremendously over the button hole. In a fever of impatience Rhoda watched her, and as soon as the flowers were pinned under her soft, round chin, she was about to run away.

"Where are you off to?" said Amy. "Virginia's as cross as two sticks, and I want someone to talk to."

"I must go," said Rhoda, looking up at her with a strangely wistful glance; then she gave her a kiss and hurried away, whilst her cousin looked after her in surprise.

It was no easy matter to get out of the house with a travelling-bag in her hand without being seen by anyone; but at last she found herself on the high road, half-an-hour too late already, and Old Man's point far ahead.

Her courage was failing fast, or her better angel was whispering a kindly warning in her ear, when a man came climbing eagerly over the rocks, and the next minute her hand was clasped in her lover's. For weal or woe the die was cast!

(To be continued.)

DEATH FROM INDIGESTION.—No doubt it is possible that the irritation set up by the presence of large masses of unmascerated food in the stomach may, in an exceptional case of weak heart, lead to the occurrence of syncope and death. Such a combination of evils has recently been found to produce a fatal result. The moral of this occurrence clearly must be to see that all food, and particularly that taken shortly before retiring to rest is properly crushed by the teeth, and, which is not less important, well saturated with the secretion of the salivary glands, which it cannot possibly be unless the process of mastication be slowly performed. It is too commonly forgotten that the food needs not only to be finely divided but to be well mixed with the saliva. Digestion, in fact, as we know, commences in the mouth, and this early stage of the process must be perfected by due elaboration if the later stages, which take place in the stomach and the intestines, are to be of avail as preparatory to absorption, assimilation, and nutrition. Artificial teeth are helpful in the performance of a necessary function when the natural teeth have ceased to be useful, and ought to be procured by all who stand in need of them. This is not a matter of vanity or taste, but one of personal expediency, of health, and even, it may be, of life itself.

THE LITTLE SINS.

—o—

The tempter uses little things
To lead the heart astray;
So harmless seeming, yet their stings
Are felt some after-day.
With small temptations on the heart
His warfare he begins,
Till, all insensibly, his art
Has led to greater sins!

The first deceitful words that pass
The lips of child, or youth,
Foretell—how many times, alas!
A future of untruth;
A life devoid of honesty,
Of virtuous deeds and aim—
A wayward life and never free
From treachery and shame.

For little sins expand at last—
To bulky sizes change,
Outdoing youth's ungodly past
In manhood's broader range—
Of rivers—tiny rills at first—
By Spring's wild torrents fed,
Swell till the yielding banks they burst,
And widening havoc spread!

No little sins are justified
Because they are so small,
And vain the hope the act to hide;
Heav'n knows and marks them all.
So in this life keep close the heart,
Nor let the tempter win,
When with sweet word and gentle art
He's found belittling sin.

D. B. W.

MAB'S SWIMMING-SCHOOL.

—o—

"I HAVEN'T the slightest idea in the world what we're going to do, girls!" said Mrs. Robert Merrill, helplessly, as she wrung her white hands. "I am sure your poor papa wouldn't have died if he'd have known how utterly destitute he was going to leave us!"

The three girls, her daughters, Mabel, Ida, and Clara, said nothing. Their hearts were so full of grief over the recent loss, and their voices so full of the choking sobs that would rise in spite of them, that they dared not trust themselves to utter a word.

A gruesome silence of several minutes followed, during which Mrs. Merrill wiped her weak eyes, and the girls stared at the pattern of the carpet—which Clara's aesthetic taste had selected out of a hundred patterns to match the specially made, hand-carved rosewood furniture.

There was a ring of expectant hope in Clara's voice when she spoke, after contemplating these luxurious surroundings.

"Must everything go, mamma?—my pony and—"

She did not complete the sentence, for her mother burst into a flood of hysterical tears and the other two girls sobbed in chorus.

Mabel—brown-eyed, curly-haired Mabel—the youngest, her father's pet—his Madcap Mab, as he used to call her—was the first to speak, and she wiped away her tears with a resolution to face the grave issue unflinchingly.

"It's no use crying, girls," she said. "We must do something. Mr. Josephs said that after everything was sold and the debts all paid there would be a few pounds left. We can rent a modest cottage somewhere and begin life anew. I've a plan already."

Her three listeners stared at her interrogatively.

"In the first place we must of course come down in our style of living. Ida is a graduate of the cooking-school, and shall look after the culinary department. We can send the washing out and have a woman come in one day in

the week to scrub and sweep. Clara can look after the sewing and the light housework."

"And what are you going to do?" asked Clara.

"I'll be the bread-winner," answered Mab, courageously.

"I hope you won't disgrace us, Mab, by going to a shop, or—or—"

"I'm going to become an instructress in Signor Franconi's swimming-school."

"What!" exclaimed Clara and Ida in one breath.

"My daughter!" cried Mrs. Merrill.

"Only a few days before papa died," continued Mabel, not noticing the interruptions—"the last time I was at the Natatorium—Signor was in despair. Signorina Adele, his daughter, had married a circus actor, and they've gone off together. He has no one to take her place."

"If the signorina was only a professional now," he said, after telling me all his troubles, "I could give her a first-class engagement."

"You know that I am fond of the water, and I'm sure Franconi will pay as much as five pounds a week for my services. By economy we can live on that, and buy mamma the little comforts and luxuries which she will so sadly need."

This speech provoked a storm of indignant protest; but Mab was determined, and when, in the midst of their argument, Ichabod Josephs, the old family lawyer, came in, and the matter was referred to him, he sided with Mab.

"The very best people patronize the Natatorium," he said, "and Mabel's associates will be all that can be desired. If Signor Franconi will engage her, I advise her to take the place."

"But think, Mab, of meeting all the girls of our set—of the snubbing that you'll receive, and—" began Ida, as a last and convincing argument.

"I have thought of all that," said Mab, before her sister could complete the sentence. "We have no right to let our pride stand between us and a comfortable living."

"Bravely spoken, little girl!" said the lawyer. "You'll succeed. If you are self-respecting the members of the swimming-school—at least those whose good opinion you care to have—will appreciate the delicacy of your position, and applaud your heroism."

The girls were disposed to be afraid of Lawyer Josephs, who was very grave, very determined and very stern at times.

They made no further objection, and Mab, glad at having won the victory so easily, put on her hat and walked down to the Natatorium to make formal application for the position of instructress in the ladies' department.

Signor Franconi was a well-bred man, and the only evidence of surprise that he displayed when Mab made known her errand was a slight elevation of his bushy eyebrows.

"One little hour ago, signorina, I was in despair," he said. "Now I am in rapture—in happiness. I engage your service at once. If you give five pounds a week to instruct the young ladies. Is the salary sufficient?"

"It is more than I expected," said Mab, with honest candour; and the bargain was made then and there.

Society was shocked when it learned of the death of banker Robert Merrill, a bankrupt; but it was actually convulsed when it became known that the dead man's youngest daughter had succeeded the Signorina Adele as swimming-teacher at the Natatorium.

The opinions that were expressed were various, and about equally divided between charitable commendation and scornful condemnation.

A larger crowd of society belles than usual attended the Tuesday afternoon school.

When they were all assembled Signor Franconi came in, leading Mab, whose dark eyes emitted a resolute fire.

"Young ladies," he said, "this is your new teacher, the Signorina Valetti."

How Mab thanked him for that introduction as she gravely acknowledged the cold bows of her former associates.

The difficulties which had at first beset her were safely overcome, and when the lesson began she was as self-possessed as she had been in the olden days, when receiving these very girls whom she now instructed at one of the dainty little "pink teas" which her father's generosity allowed her to give.

They always addressed her as the Signorina Valetti, and there were no unpleasant scenes, although sometimes an incautious remark would bring a flush to Mab's face.

Acting under Lawyer Josephs' advice, every article that connected them with the old life was sent to the auction-rooms, to help pay the dead banker's debts.

Among other articles was a tiny bronze clock, which Mab had won in a swimming-contest when she was a pupil at the Nata-torium.

She valued it very highly, and bitter tears filled her eyes when it was taken away.

She had been attached to the swimming-school hardly a week when one morning Signor Franconi placed in her hand a small box.

"It is for you, Signorina," he said.

And when Mab opened it and took out the little clock, whose pendulum was swung by two naids, a cry of joy escaped her and tears came to her eyes.

"It was very kind of you, Signor Franconi," she said.

"You do me too much honour, Signorina," he said, deprecatingly. "I know nothing. The package was left by a—a—man."

"Who could it have been?" she asked herself, and took the clock out of the box.

In the bottom of the box was a card, on which was written, in a bold hand,—

"For Mab—from a friend, who admires her courage."

"It was one of the girls," she thought; but the written characters on the card were decidedly masculine, and when she compared them with a little note treasured among her keepsakes, and signed "Howard Grant," a pleasurable flush suffused her face, and she stared for a long time, alternately at the card and note, with eyes that were thoughtfully humid.

The season before, at Scarborough, she had made herself a heroine by dragging Howard Grant out of the surf, just as he was sinking for the last time.

They had been friends from childhood, and she scolded him roundly for venturing out beyond his depth.

"Everybody should learn to swim, Howard," she said; "and you ought to learn at the Nata-torium."

"I will, Mab," he said; and the little note which she had treasured was a brief acknowledgment that he had taken her advice.

She had not met him since her father's death, although his sister Aggie was a member of her class at the swimming-school, and his mother passed her in the street without a sign of recognition.

That afternoon, as Mab came down the steps of the swimming-school, he was passing, and raised his hat, with a frank smile of recognition.

Mab bowed a little coldly, and hurried quickly home.

She saw him several times during the season, and once he would have spoken to her, but she dashed past him and disappeared in the crowd.

Signor Franconi always closed his school with a grand contest, at which prizes were awarded to the best swimmers.

It was a fashionable event, and was always largely attended.

Professor Franconi delivered the prizes to the young lady winners, and he delegated to

Mabel the task of rewarding the gentlemen swimmers.

Howard Grant was one of the competitors, and Mabel could not refrain from uttering a timid "Bravo!" when he swept up to the finish a half-dozen feet ahead of all his competitors.

The first prize was a gold medal, and when Howard came up to receive it from Mabel's hands he noticed how they trembled as she pinned it on the lapel of his coat.

The men were cheering, and the ladies were waving their handkerchiefs, as he bent his head close to hers and whispered,—

"Mab, there's another prize that I'm anxious to win—your own dear self. You know I've always loved you, but you've avoided me. Let me call to-morrow. I know your address."

She did not say "Yes!" but her head drooped lower, and the blushes chased each other across her face.

"I can come, then?" he persisted.

She did not say "No!" and the next morning he presented himself at the little cottage to which the Merrills had retired.

When Mr. Howard Grant and Miss Mabel Merrill were married at St. Jude's the whole fashionable world attended.

Mab had six bridesmaids. Three of them had been her pupils at the swimming-school, but they seemed to forget that the proud and happy bride was once their swimming-teacher—Signorina Valetti.

"I knew you'd win, little girl," said Lawyer Josephs, as he bent his grizzled head over her hands, after the wedding breakfast. "At the auction I bid in the little clock for Grant, and gave him your address. Do you forgive me?"

She looked up into her husband's eyes, which were beaming with pride, and her trembling hand involuntarily sought his.

She turned to the lawyer.

"Yes," she said, "I forgive you!"

C. A. K.

HABITS OF CATS.

SOME cats will not only jump high enough to rattle a latch or touch a door-knob, when they desire to gain an entrance to a house, but have even been known to exhibit intelligence enough to push open a door, or raise a latch and open it, as effectually as a human being could perform the same feat. I once knew of a goose that would spring up and catch the string attached to an inside wooden latch, open the door, and walk in and up to the fire as deliberately as any one of the family. To him the latch-string was seldom out, except by way of experiment. It could hardly be said of him "as stupid as a goose."

Cats are full of curiosity: and if a new chair or other piece of furniture is brought in when they are out, as soon as seen they walk around it, smell of it, and touch it: sometimes climb up on it, sit awhile, and go off satisfied. When hungry, they lick out the tongue, elevate the tail, and follow some one around, or pull at the clothing of the arm, or lap to attract attention to their wants. The tail is lowered when satisfied with eating or with drinking. Scratching at the door is their sign for wanting to go out also. The same sign on the outside indicates a desire to get into the house. If the door is partially open, "special pleading," in a cat's way, to get in, is shown by a protrusion of the tongue beneath the nose, or a look and a gentle mew.

Shaking the head or jerking the foot is not only an effort to free the foot or ears from water, but is a sign of disgust or dislike—the degree measured by the energy of the action.

Rubbing the head is an effort to attract attention, as well as a sign of friendship and familiarity. Purring is an emotional satisfaction or an anxiety. A large yellow cat of ours used to follow the servant to the meadow, sit on a log till the milking ended, and return with the milk—*a case of clear selfishness*, for he wanted milk, and always received it.

KENNETH'S CHOICE.

—:—

CHAPTER XVI.

It had been an awful blow to Kenneth, Earl of Combermere, when he discovered his own secret. It had seemed to him, as he stood before the fair pictured form of the Lily Maid of Asbelot that, dearly as he loved her, the fact that it was widely believed her father's hand had made his mother a widow must for all separate them—that not even love such as his could sanctify the union between the family of a murderer and that of his victim.

Kenneth left the Royal Academy full of good (?) resolutions for the prudent ordering of his future. He went to the very place where such prudent plans would be encouraged; and yet that first visit to Lady Combermere and the granddaughter in Cadogan-place quite upset all Kenneth's wise resolutions.

Margaret St. Clunes spoke slightly of her foster-sister, and Kenneth found himself almost hating her on the spot. Not all Lady Combermere's praises of his cousin could change Kenneth's opinion of her. And when he left the house his mind was quite made up; since an insuperable barrier loomed between him and Nell he would never marry at all.

But then the question would crop up, *was the barrier unsurpassable?* He asked Mr. Ashwin if there would be no chance of proving poor Gordon's innocence, and then came upon him the extraordinary scene at his mother's house. Her protestation that she had seen her husband's ghost; Emily Taylor's simple verdict that a man who could let himself be parted from the girl he loved because an accusation rested on her father's name, could not know what real love was. It all happened within twelve hours. The discovery of his love for Nell, his prudent resolutions then fading away, the love-conquering scruples, and the final choice that nothing but her own deed should come between him and Nell.

But fate was assuredly against true love in this case. Poor Kenneth, as we know, received a wound in his ghostly encounter, and for more than three weeks was almost an invalid, his sole acquaintance with the world outside Cadogan-place being (and that only after a fortnight's seclusion) a daily drive with his hostess.

He did not bear the suspense well. He was devoured by an intense anxiety to see Nell and plead his cause, but he was saved one pang. He knew well all the papers had chronicled his illness, though he had passed in Paris as "Mr. St. Clune."

Nell was aware of his true rank. She would not think he had forgotten his little friend, because he neither wrote nor called. She would know he was too ill to do either.

One thing surprised him. Bruce Carew neither came nor sent to inquire after him. Day after day the young Earl insisted on the cards left at the door being brought to him. He plodded through the contents of the silver salver day after day, but he never saw the name of the kind, if eccentric artist, and this omission made him the more eager to go to Oakley Cottage and see his friends; so it was almost with a boyish exultation he dressed himself on Monday to go out for the first time alone.

Of course Lady Combermere's carriage was at his disposal. The Countess would dearly have liked to go in it herself, and wait outside her favourite's chambers, while he arranged the papers and answered the correspondence, which were the avowed object of his expedition; but Kenneth told her, smiling, there was no carriage approach to the particular part of the Temple where he resided, and that he felt quite strong, and a few hours' literary labours would not hurt him in the least.

"Indeed," continued the young Earl, gaily, "I begin to think I must have been a shocking impostor all this time; I feel so well and strong. I shall most likely go on to Fulham

and look up Carew if I keep as well as I am, so don't expect me much before dinner."

A pretty pink colour came into Lady Combermere's cheeks. She blushed like a girl.

"I do so wish, Kenneth, you would bring Mr. Carew in to dinner! It would make me feel almost young again to meet him once more. It is years and years since I have seen him."

"I will give the message, Aunt Lucy, but I can't answer for him. Carew has a whole-some dread of titles. He may not feel equal to seeing a Countess!"

"Tell him to think of me as Lucy Talbot!"

"You shall be obeyed, Aunty!" and Kenneth smiled almost lustfully. "Wish me good luck!"

"My dear boy! what are you going to do? He had no mind to tell her.

"It is my first return to active life since the accident, and you know that follow's stiletto might have finished me, so I think you ought to wish me good luck!"

"My dear boy, you know I wish it you with all my heart." And with those words ringing in his ears Lord Combermere went out into the summer sunshine, for time had passed since his return from Paris, and bright June had come.

He went to his chambers first. Kenneth would have scorned to tell or act a lie. He had said to Lady Combermere he was going to "see after things at the Temple," and he did so. Besides, two was much too early for Fulham, so he opened letters and answered them with tolerable attention, and was fairly engrossed in his task when the housekeeper came bustling up, and said a gentleman wished to see him.

Kenneth glanced at the card—"Edward Mayo!" he muttered to himself. "What can he want? Well, I always liked the fellow; and, as he is to have Emily some day, and I regard her as a sister, I may as well cultivate his acquaintance."

The two men shook hands. The clergyman made all suitable inquiries for the Earl's health, and then a strange silence crept over them both.

"I hardly know how to tell you what has brought me here," began Mr. Mayo at last. "I fear you will think me taking an unwarrantable liberty, but I have consulted a friend of mine who knows you better far than I do, and she assured me I ought to come even if you were offended."

"My dear fellow!" said Kenneth, simply, "I am not given to take offence; and if Miss Taylor—of course she is the friend you speak of—advised you to come to me I am sure you were right to come. I can't promise to agree with what you say, but I will listen patiently and believe in your motive if I can't in your arguments."

Poor Mr. Mayo looked as if he hated the task before him.

"I think you have heard from Emily I am curate of Marden, Lord Combermere? I live in the very house once occupied by your cousin, Miss St. Clune, and her foster-mother."

Kenneth smiled.

"I see my suspicions were wrong. I really believed you had come to scold me on the matter of ghosts; and that you would prove the whole affair at my mother's a mere hallucination. Of course I know you live at Marden—and a very pretty place it is."

"Yes. You see, living there, Lord Combermere, I could not help hearing things, and I soon found out that no one in the place knew the true name and rank of the young lady who had lived among them as Queenie Marsh."

"I believe that was a fancy of her own. It was given out she was going to reside with her grandmother; and not even her foster-sister heard her address."

"Yes. It was not until I spent a few days at Whiteladies last week, and heard from Emily of Miss St. Clune's former history, that I had any proof of her connection with the beautiful girl who left Marden so suddenly. I had suspected it, I own."

Lord Combermere looked bewildered.

"I assure you I have not the least idea what you are driving at. I have promised you not to be offended. Can't you speak plainly? Forgive me if I seem irritable, but I have been very ill, and I never could bear hints patiently!"

"May I ask you one question, my lord? Are you engaged to Miss St. Clune?"

"No. And if you care to hear it I never shall. The whole world may know that!"

"Then I can speak openly. I have a friend," his voice shook with strong emotion, "who is at the point of death—sent there, Lord Combermere, by your cousin's hand. He was the finest, tenderest-hearted man I ever met! A brave sailor, a frank, open-hearted gentleman, who, if he had not a long line of titled ancestors, and that external polish mingling in the best society alone can give, yet might have moved in the highest circles as one of Nature's noblemen. The son and heir of the richest man in Marden, he loved Queenie Marsh as his own soul. Knowing her mother's objections to lovers he proposed to her privately, and was accepted. A week before her mother's death he sailed on his last voyage; in less than three months he was to return and claim his bride. His father would yield them the fine old mansion he had bought at Marden, and settle eight hundred a-year on them. Truly it was a brilliant prospect for a girl living in extreme poverty."

"And she forsook him?"

"She did worse. If she had written to Austin Brooks, telling him frankly of her altered fortunes, and that she must now look higher than a mere country gentleman, I for one could have forgiven her; but she went off without leaving him the slightest clue to her whereabouts; and weeks later sent him a note—still no address—saying she was with her grandmother, who hated all such things as lovers and engagements. Until she came of age she could not marry him. She would not seek to bind him; he should be free; only until she read of his marriage to another she should think herself his fiancee, and wear his ring.

"And she is a St. Clune," there was passionate indignation in Kenneth's voice. "Of course, I understand the motive of her letter—it was to keep her lover quiet until she was actually married."

"Until she was Lady Combermere, my lord," said Mr. Mayo shortly. "Yes, the letter was bad enough, but there is worse to come."

Kenneth threw up his hands.

"What can be worse than treachery!"

The curate went on with the story of Austin Brooks's life in London, and the strange events which preceded his illness. He said the young man's father had spared neither pains nor expense to unearth the truth; and it was discovered, after an infinitude of trouble, that the letter which sent Austin forth in such high spirits as related by Mrs. Milner was signed "his own Queenie," and had appointed a meeting at a certain house in a lonely private road in a distant suburb.

The note was placed by Mr. Mayo in Lord Combermere's hands, and he said at once,—

"Yes, it is her writing—not a doubt of it. And this was—when?"

"A fortnight ago. Mr. Brooks's absence lasted a week, and it is now nearly as long since we were summoned to his sick bed. I cannot explain to you how it was, but some instinct told me, even before this letter was found, his suffering had come through the girl he loved. There was a fancy portrait in his rooms which he valued from its strong resemblance to Queenie. Getting leave of absence from the Vicar, I went down to White ladies, risking your mother's thinking my intrusion a presumption; then I showed the picture to Emily, who told me at once it was a likeness of Miss St. Clune in fancy dress. I told Emily all I knew, and she urged me to come to you. I had to go back to Marden in time for Sunday's duties, but I came up by the

first train to-day, and after learning the latest particulars from Mr. Brooks I set out to try and find you."

Poor Kenneth was trembling like a man with the ague. He was passionately fond of Combermere Abbey, he dearly loved his grand old name; and both were possessed by a woman whose conduct was a disgrace and scandal to her sex! It really seemed to Kenneth he could never hold up his head again.

One comfort he had—and one alone.

"My choice was made," thought the poor fellow to himself before he knew this. "I had fixed in my mind to refuse to marry her. Thank Heaven, I shall not go to my darling because the character of the woman I meant to marry is so vile that no gold could gild over its blot. I had made up my mind to tell Neil of my love, and do what life and mind could to win hers in return, before ever I dreamed of the wickedness concealed beneath my cousin's lovely face!"

But he had not heard all. It dawned on him slowly there was more to come. He tried to collect his thoughts. He looked again at the note in Margaret's writing, which yet lay in his hand.

"And this meeting! Did it take place?"

"I only heard the truth of that to-day. Lord Combermere, you look weak and tired. Are you sure you can bear to listen to it?"

"I would rather hear all." And Kenneth pouring himself out a tumbler of water drank it at one draught. "Please go on."

"Mr. Brooks sent down a detective to see the house and make inquiries. At first the poor old man thought Austin's talk the mere ravings of delirium, but the doctor was a far-seeing man, and he guessed the account was of no fancied honours, but of something actually endured by the poor sufferer. By his advice a skilled detective went down to Elmer's End to make inquiries."

"Elmer's End! What an extraordinary place to choose—so difficult of access, so small, and so remote!"

"All those drawbacks as you think them were so many advantages. The house was old, and had been to let so long that the landlord was not likely to be too particular as to his tenants' antecedents. The situation was so lonely I don't suppose a dozen persons passed down the road in the course of a day."

"And Margaret met him there?"

"She did not. A respectable woman—so the detective learned after many inquiries—and her husband were the new tenants of Meadowbank, and they gave out they were expecting an invalid visitor. The date they fixed for his arrival is the one named by Miss St. Clune for the meeting. He was seen to go in there. Nothing further can be learned except that the day after his return to London the key of Meadowbank was sent to the landlord with a quarter's rent in gold in a registered packet. The man and his wife had disappeared. They owed no one a halfpenny; no one had thought their flight extraordinary, the general impression being that Meadowbank was so gloomy and deserted no one would be likely to stop there."

"And you think—?"

"Poor Austin's ravings supply the rest of the narrative. From them we gather he was kept shut up in a cellar without furniture and kept without light; almost without food to induce him to swear to give up all claim on his faithless fiancee, and to promise silence on her past when she married her noble lover the Earl of Combermere."

"This is terrible!"

"So I felt. Emily and I consulted together before we knew the last link in the story, but even then we felt that even if you did not believe us, if you treated the tale with scorn and quarrelled with us both, our duty was to let you know the truth. Better that you should break your heart at parting from your beautiful cousin than give your name to one who has acted inhumanly."

"I never meant to marry her. She never

inspired me with any feeling of regard. I admit she is beautiful, but even her beauty had no power to charm me."

"The treatment of her foster-sister is enough to show what she is."

Kenneth started.

"Nell needs no patronage from Miss St. Clune," he said proudly. "She is the adopted daughter of an artist and his wife, who love her as their own child, and will spare no pains to make her happy."

"And who cast her adrift last Thursday evening to starve, beg, or sin, as seemed best to her? I think those people must be of much the same calibre as your cousin, Lord Combermere."

Kenneth was white at death; he clutched wildly at the table for support.

"Be merciful! For pity sake tell me all you know. Where is Nell? What has become of her? Don't keep me in suspense. You don't know what this is to me. I love her as my own soul. It was my dearest wish to tell her my wife, and but for your visit I should have been at Fulham before now to tell her so."

"You would not have found her. I only heard the story on Saturday, but it made my blood boil. Mr. Brooks, who knew me at Marden before her troubles began, met her wandering alone in London by gaslight, looking for some humble lodging not beyond her means.

"He is not wise, you would call a gentleman, Lord Combermere, but he has a father's heart. He went up to her and spoke to her. At first she refused his goodness; she could not forget, she said, all he had suffered through her foster-sister. Besides, the reason which had made Mrs. Ainslie cast her out might turn him, too, into her foe. He got the truth out of her somehow. Poor child! It seems her father had been accused of murder, and died before his innocence could be proved. The mother took a morbid view of his guilt, changed her name, and never spoke of her past."

"It must have come on the poor girl like a thunder-bolt. She went out, leaving Mrs. Ainslie her loving, adopted mother. In her absence Miss St. Clune—from what motive one is at a loss to tell unless mere cruelty—swept down upon the Cottage with the story of the past. Mrs. Ainslie confronted Nell with it on her return, and would not believe the girl was as innocent of deception as herself then. She cast her adrift."

"Where was Bruce Carew? Mrs. Ainslie's brother, I mean. Surely he never turned against Nell?"

"He is in Africa! Mr. Ainslie was absent. The lady seems to have been alone."

"And I thought her a good woman."

"Well, perhaps she thought so too. You need not be anxious about Miss Marsh, Lord Combermere; old Mr. Brooks acted by her as kindly as though she had been the child of a dear friend. He took her to a lady's house for the night, and the next morning left his sick son's room to go with her to Marden, and instate her as companion to his crippled daughter."

"Mopy Brooks told me herself on Sunday she loved Nell already; and the poor sickly child is very staunch in her affections. It might have meant starvation, misery, death, that general expulsion from Fulham; but thanks to Providence Miss St. Clune's malice has only sent her foster-sister back to the home of her childhood to fill an honourable post in a good man's house."

"Hawke, bless him!" cried Lord Combermere. "I should like to see him and thank him; but I expect he hates the sound of my name!"

"No, he is too just for that. He might have done so had you married Miss St. Clune; but he is too kind to bear malice for your having unconsciously been his boy's rival."

Kenneth drew a long breath.

"I should like to go to Marden."

"I must beg you not to think of it at

present. You are something of an invalid, and must not trifle with yourself!"

"But I want to see Nell!"

"I think I can answer for it she will not run away. I return to-night, and I will gladly take any message for you. Besides, Lord Combermere, I think your duty calls on you to remain in town!"

"My duty!"

"I do not ask you to publish the story I have told you. I can understand the pain it would give you, but surely the Countess of Combermere should hear the true character of the girl she loves! In justice to the poor fellow whose life she has wrecked Miss St. Clune ought not to go scot-free."

"True; but my brain feels on fire. I don't think I could talk to her. The very sight of her would make me shudder!"

"The revelation should not fall on you; indeed, it ought not to do so. Couldn't Mr. Ashwin undertake it?"

"I have not seen Mr. Ashwin for ages—not since my encounter with the ghost. I believe he makes it a point of conscience never to go to Lady Combermere's if he can possibly help it, and he has set his heart on finding out the truth of the strange occurrence which ashamed my mother, and might have had such terrible results for me!"

"I thought he had discovered the truth!"

"Impossible!"

"The man who persecuted Mr. Marks did me the honour to break into my cottage the night following your encounter with him. He abstracted some letters from Miss Taylor relating to Mrs. Marks's house. Fortunately the Vicar saw him (before his little money at house-breaking), and is a good hand at drawing. His sketch of my unwelcome visitor would pass anywhere. Mr. Ashwin says, for a picture of your stepfather. An old servant of Mrs. Marks's absconded with him, and wrote me a kind of vindictive letter, saying she had been his wife for years. The sketch of the man and another of poor Sally have been handed to the detective, and he has made two most important discoveries. The man's portrait answers in all particulars to a step-father of Mr. Marks, who was a kind of family ne'er-do-well, and had not been heard of for some months at the time of the lawyer's murder. The other discovery is yet more strange. This man and his wife are declared to be the couple who took Meadow Bank and kept Austin Brooks a prisoner there!"

"But their object?"

"Money on his. No doubt Miss St. Clune promised liberal terms; but the woman had lived with Mrs. Marsh for years, and loved your cousin devotedly. She acted most likely from affection to her nursing."

"It sounds wonderful!"

"Doesn't it? Of course there is a great deal to be explained. Why has this man kept quiet all these years if money was his object, seeing he would have had more chance of working on your mother's feelings earlier? Then why did not Mr. Marks confide to his wife the existence of this relation with such an extraordinary resemblance to himself?"

"It explains one thing," said Kenneth dreamily. "Marks was just the kind of man to make a poor relation wear his old clothes; that is how he got the jet studs. Do you know—though I am as sceptical about ghosts as you can be—when I saw the three identical Maltese crosses my step-father always wore in this shirt-front I trembled."

"I can well believe it. It is wonderful how secret Mr. Marks kept the existence of his brother. Mr. Ashwin had never heard of him. It was only by me asking a very old man who had once been clerk to the firm of Trevlyn and Marks we heard anything at all!"

"And he remembered him?"

"Perfectly, and said your step-father was annoyed at the resemblance (which, bearing in mind his brother's disreputable character is hardly surprising); he did everything in his power to alter it, but all his efforts were

fruitless. If he shaved his brother shaved too; if he wore short hair or long hair, hair parted or hair brushed straight, his faithful follower imitated him exactly. At last the man's conduct was so outrageous Mr. Trevlyn forbade him the office, and he only turned up again a few weeks before the murder, when he promised to go to Australia if his brother would advance him a certain sum to begin life with. As he made no sign all through the trial, and never even applied to know the provisions of the will, the conclusion Mr. Ashwin takes is that he got the money, and had sailed for the Antipodes before his brother's murder."

A sudden fancy flashed through Kenneth's mind, so bright that he felt it was almost impossible. He dismissed it as being born only of his own wishes, and did not even confide it to the sympathetic young curate.

"You seem to have been the moving-power in all this business, Mr. Mayo! While I have been laid aside almost as helpless as a log you have been making yourself invaluable. I am sure I can never forget your kindness."

Mr. Mayo smiled.

"I am meeting with a very different reception from the one I expected. I must confess I came here to-day most reluctantly."

"You surely did not think me so infatuated with Miss St. Clune as to be her blind partisan?"

"I thought you would resent my story, not so much on her account as that it touched your family pride. I learned how strong that is in my intercourse with the late Earl."

Kenneth looked perplexed.

"I suppose it is her having lived apart from us all so long. But I never seem to realise my cousin Margaret is a St. Clune."

"Will Lady Combermere take the matter to heart, do you think?"

"I fear it will be a terrible blow to her. She has continued to shut her eyes to all imperfections in Margaret, and regards her as a kind of sacred legacy from her husband."

"And you agree she should be told?"

"Yes. I go further. I think anyone who sought to marry my cousin should be warned of her character."

"She is so beautiful, it would not deter many men. I fear she will break more hearts than poor Austin's before her career is finished at the hymeneal altar."

"I wonder whom she will marry?"

"I suppose if she died unmarried the estate would pass to you?"

I would rather not think of that; the contingency never presented itself to me."

"I own I should like to see you master of Combermere Abbey. The late Earl's will has always seemed to me peculiarly unjust."

"He could hardly divine his granddaughter's character," said Kenneth, gravely. Then, in a different tone, "For me, I have come to the conclusion wealth does not bring happiness. I am tired of London and fashionable life. I possess three hundred a-year of my own, and if a certain young lady will only consent to trust herself to me, I think that will be enough for a simple country home; and as I get on in my profession we shall be able to do much out. Will you and Emily be kind neighbours to us, Mayo, if we come and pitch our tent at Marden?"

"An Earl and Countess settle at Marden! The place would lose its head at the idea!"

"I rather fancy I shall drop the title. It would be too absurd for a maid-of-all-work (or would it run to a cook and housemaid) to address her master as 'my lord.' But these are only vague dreams, Mayo. I have no right to build on Miss Marsh's consent, since I have never even hinted my wishes to her."

"You will be happy if she does consent?" said Edward Mayo, thoughtfully. "Even poverty with such a wife could have no sting. Sally once told me Miss Nell's face is like the angels, and when once I had seen her I understood and appreciated the description."

"Poor Sally! Only fancy if your suspicions are correct—she and my mother are sisters-in-



"YES, IT IS HER WAITING," KENNETH CRIED OUT—"NOT A DOUBT OF IT.]

law! I hope the mother will never know it. I don't think her pride would ever get over having such a near connection who had been a general servant."

"Poor Sally! But not for your reason. Those years of honest toil are nothing for her to blush about; but she strikes me as a noble character spoilt!"

"By what?"

"By love, or what passes for love in these evil days. Her wild passion for this reckless man has wrecked her whole life, just as trouble and hardships have wrecked her face, which must once have been as beautiful as Miss St. Clunes."

A little travelling clock struck six. Mr. Mayo started to his feet.

"I must be going."

"But we have settled nothing!"

"I am quite sure you have talked long enough; and, indeed, there is nothing more to decide. It rests with you to see Mr. Ashwin, and empower him to break what I have told you to the Countess. He will advise you whether to tell Miss St. Clune of our discoveries. For me, I shall stay this night in town that I may relieve Mr. Brooks in the care of Austin, then I shall catch the early train to Marden."

"And you will see Nell?"

"I shall call at the Manor House the first thing to give Miss Brooks the last news of her brother."

"And you will tell Nell?"

"Whatever you intrust to me."

Kenneth thought a moment.

"Tell her, please, what a helpless log I have been ever since she returned to England; but that as soon as I can leave the kind nursing of my aunt I shall come to Marden, and that I hope Miss Marsh will be as kind to me as was Miss Ainslie."

"I will remember."

"That will tell her I know all the cruelty she has met with."

"Yes."

"What are you keeping back? I can see there is something you are hiding."

"I think," said Mayo, simply, "the report of your engagement to Miss St. Clune has reached her foster-sister."

There was a bitter expression on Kenneth's face, but he suppressed it.

"She has heard, I daresay, that by Lord Combermere's will I had to choose between wealth with my cousin or poverty without her. Tell her, please, I shall be a poor man all my days. You need say nothing of engagements or marriages, only tell my darling I shall be a poor man all my days. She will know then that Kenneth's choice is made."

The young curate saw his friend off in a cab for Cadogan-place, and then turned in the direction of Austin Brooks's lodgings.

"A noble-hearted fellow!" was his verdict on Lord Combermere. "And Emily is quite right—he will never sell himself for gold. All the St. Clunes have been noted for their truth and honour. The mother of this heartless heiress was a refined, patient gentlewoman. Wherever in the world, then, does Margaret St. Clune inherit her cruel, unwomanly nature?"

It was a problem hard to solve; as hard, perhaps, as the one which had once perplexed him about Sally. He had answered that puzzle. He knew now she had all those years been living under a mask, waiting, waiting, for her husband's return, and watching over—at a humble distance—her nursing Queenie. He knew now it was from the *Queen* and the Society papers, whose purchase had so bewildered him, she kept herself posted in her darling's movements, just as in some strange way—as yet unknown to him—the *Police News* kept her in touch with her husband.

He would have declared it impossible had anyone told him Sally was destined to surprise him yet more than she had done already. He would have laughed at the idea that Lord

Combermere's future depended on the caprice of this strange woman.

At the moment when the curate entered Austin Brooks's sick room, Lord Combermere was opening a telegram from Emily Taylor.

"Come down at once, and bring Mr. Ashwin if you can. The ghost has followed us to Whiteladies!"

(To be continued.)

Crows.—When passing through the meadows on my way to work one morning I observed a crow pecking in a small pool formed in the walk by the previous night's rain. Being curious to know what he was so vigorously engaged with, I came cautiously forward and saw it was a crust of bread, which he was apparently softening in the water. On my approach he flew away and lighted on the grass some twenty yards off, and then commenced to peck away with seeming pertinacity. I passed on for a short distance, still keeping my eyes on him, when he started again for the pool, tossed in the crust, and turned it over two or three times in the water, at the same time testing, as I thought, the softness of it. While the crow was thus engaged, another man came along and disturbed him at his breakfast, whereupon he lifted his crust, flew to some distance on the grass, laid it down, opened up a tuft of grass with his bill, put in his bread and carefully drew the grass over it again, and immediately flew away. Now his purpose in steeping the crust and hiding it in the tuft of grass I can understand, as I have no doubt he intended coming back for his meal when it would be in a condition better suited for mastication; but the question is, how was he to find again this particular tuft of grass among the thousands around it? He took no note of the locality, so far as I could observe.



["NOT YET!" PLEADED ELEANOR, SOBBING. "PROMISE ME YOU WILL NOT MENTION THE SECRET TO A SOUL!"]

NOVELETTE.]

ROSE DALFORD'S PLOT.

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CHAPTER I.

ROSE DALFORD.

The Carringtons of Carrington Hall, in the picturesque village of Wetherton, were of ancient lineage, and were admired and respected by all who knew them, and up to a few years before this story opens they were as rich as Croesus; but, owing to a large bank failure, in which they lost nearly the whole of their fortune, their income was reduced to a very limited one, and Sir John Carrington had been obliged to mortgage his beautiful estate, to enable him to live in his much-loved home, which had belonged to the Carringtons for many generations, and was always handed down with the baronetcy from father to son; and it was a great trouble to Sir John that he should have nothing but encumbered property to leave his heir, of whom he was very proud, and deservedly so, for Hubert Carrington was a fine, handsome young fellow of twenty-one, and as straightforward and honest as the day, and all who were acquainted with him acknowledged he had a grand and powerful character.

Sir John had spared no expense with his son's education, but he would not allow him to enter any profession, as he greatly wished to do, as he intended Hubert to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors, and lead the life of a country gentleman; and he was also determined that as soon as Hubert left Oxford, he would find a suitable wife for him, with sufficient money to pay off the mortgages, and to enable him to settle down with a comfortable income as well.

But who this lady was to be he could not yet discover, for he knew no one, in all his number of friends, whom he considered half good enough to enter his family.

But one day, much to the delight of the Baronet, the magnificent estate next his own, was bought by a retired diamond merchant; and tales of his mine of wealth arrived before him; and it was also stated he was a widower with one child, who was a daughter.

And as soon as Mr. Dalford made his appearance, Sir John lost no time in making his acquaintance, and found he was a very gentlemanly man and a most agreeable companion, and the two men took a great fancy to each other, and very soon became fast friends; and many a talk they had over their children's future, the merchant desiring position for his daughter, and Sir John did not hesitate to say he required money for his son. And when Hubert returned from college, Mr. Dalford was so taken with him, that he hinted to the Baronet how much he would like the estates to be united, saying that Rose was a very beautiful girl, and worthy of being any man's wife, and that he would settle £50,000 upon her on her wedding-day, and that at his death she would inherit £50,000 more and Fairmead Abbey.

And Sir John was satisfied; and he had clasped the merchant's hand warmly before leaving, and told him he could consider the matter settled.

All might have gone well but for one thing. Instead of keeping their own counsel, Mr. Dalford wrote off a glowing account to Rose, of the brilliant career before her as the future Lady Carrington, and stated how anxious he was she should accept the position, when Hubert proposed to her.

And Sir John took an early opportunity to tell his son that he wished him to retrieve the lost fortunes of the family by making an alliance with Rose Dalford, saying what a handsome wedding dower her father intended to give.

And Hubert told Sir John that he meant to marry for love, and for love only, and that if he did not admire Miss Dalford, nothing would induce him to ask her to share his life.

And a hot argument ensued between them, in which the Baronet urged upon his son the advisability of making so good a match, but without the slightest effect; for Hubert was obdurate. And Sir John, although he at last dropped the subject, made up his mind he would make his son obey his wishes, and that he would receive no girl without a fortune as his daughter-in-law.

And thus time went on, and it only wanted one month to Christmas Day; and then Rose was to leave Germany, where she was at school, and return to England, and settle down at the mistress of Fairmead Abbey; and great preparations were being made to give her a loyal welcome home.

But a fortnight before that season arrived, Mr. Dalford was suddenly called to his last rest, and Rose was left possessor of the Abbey and £100,000.

Mr. Dalford had died of heart disease, without a second's warning; and when Rose heard of her loss, she was so ill from the shock of the unexpected news, that for days she was unable to leave her room; but she telegraphed to Mr. Francis, her father's solicitor, to make all the necessary arrangements for his funeral, and to see he was buried in his own vault at Hanbury, where they had formerly lived.

And then, much as she wished to return to England to see the last of the father she had loved so dearly in life, and mourned so truly in death, she was quite unfit to do so. It was early in the new year before she was able to travel, and the first journey she took was to Hanbury, to visit her father's grave; and then she accepted an invitation from an old school-fellow, who was living in the neighbourhood with an aunt, who had adopted her when she lost both her parents by a railway accident, at the age of three, and had ever treated her as her own child. She had sent her to a well-known London college with her two daughters, and it was there that Rose and Eleanor Framley became acquainted.

August 27, 1887.

They had been friends ever since, and when they were entering womanhood, their affection for each other seemed to increase, and it was a real pleasure to Eleanor to have Rose with her in her sorrow, and try and comfort her.

Gradually her spirits seemed to return, and the two girls would go for long walks together in the tangled woods of Hanbury, and gather the lovely wild flowers as the spring advanced. "Lena," said Rose, one day, "I think it is time I went to my own home. It is always hard right of me to leave all the ~~friends~~ to do just what they like."

"You may depend upon it they would much rather you remained away," laughed Eleanor, "as long as you supply them with plenty of money for housekeeping; and I can answer for your doing that by the amount of cheques you send them down."

"Very likely they prefer my room to my company," replied Rose, smiling; "but when they have never seen me yet, and, when once they do, they will wish me to stay with them."

"Don't you believe it?" returned Eleanor. "They are doubtless having fine fuably themselves, and you will hear, on your return, they are having dinner parties every night in your dining room, and dances in the billiard-room, and if you ~~have~~ ^{are} letting many evening dresses in your boxes, your house and parlour will still have kept them aired for you. No, Rose, stay with us, dear, and we will take care of you."

"I am sure of it," said Rose, with a great smile; "but now Mrs. and Mrs. are coming home for good, my room will be wanted."

"Nonsense!" returned Eleanor, decidedly. "You must not talk of going away. Do not spare you; think how lonely I should be when you were gone."

"But I don't mean to go away from you," laughed Rose, "for I have made up my mind to take you back with me."

Eleanor looked up joyously at her friend's words.

"Do you think Auntie would let me go?" she asked.

"Yes, certainly, now her own children are coming to take care of her; and if she makes any objection, I will soon coax her over."

"Oh, I am glad," said Eleanor, dancing a sort of war dance with delight; "what fun we shall have, doing the grand all by ourselves!"

A pained look passed over Rose's face, for she knew how terribly she would miss her father, who she loved so truly, but she put herself aside, and entered into the girl's merriment.

"Yes," she replied; "we shall be mistress of all we survey!"

"Say you will be, Rose. As for me, I have not a sixpence in the world to call my own; and, if it had not been for Auntie's goodness I should have died of starvation long ago, or have been sent to the workhouse."

"Or to Dr. Barnardo's Home," said Rose, mischievously, "or some other equally charitable institution. And really, dear, you have lost a chance of being brought before the public in a most interesting manner, for by this time a touching little pamphlet would doubtless have been written about you, entitled *Saved from Destruction*, or something equally telling."

"Do be quiet," said Eleanor, with vexation; "you don't know what a miserable thing it is to be poor."

"No, I am thankful to say I do not," replied Rose, quietly; "but you must marry well, Lena, and then your troubles will be over; nor do you intend to try love in a cottage with Cousin Dick? Is he made a lieutenant yet?"

"No, not at present," replied Eleanor, blushing, "and if he were, I should not wish to be his wife!"

"Do you tell him so?" asked Rose, quizzically.

"Oh, of course," returned Eleanor, laughing.

"That is all right, then," said Rose, "and

she will not have reason to complain if you run off with a millionaire at Wethereton."

"Money requires money," answered Eleanor, a little bitterly; "a penniless girl like me stands no chance at all. If I had *your* fortune at my command I could wed whoever I chose."

A mischievous look came into Rose's eyes.

"Would you really like my chance of marrying?" she asked. "If so, we will change places for a year. You shall go down to Fairmead Abbey as Miss Dalford, and I will go as your companion. No one will be any the wiser, nor even the servants; for poor father told me he took an entirely new staff down there, and there were no pictures of me, as he died an absurd superstition it was very unlucky to have your portrait taken, so our plot will not be discovered; and if you can make a good alliance by that time as much the better, if not, you will be able to acknowledge money is not as attractive as you imagined, and you will be better contented with your position."

"You don't mean it?" she asked, incredulously.

"Certainly," laughed Rose, "and you shall dress as fashionably as you like, and I will pay the bills."

"But suppose someone did fall in love with me, thinking I was rich? What would be done then?" said Eleanor, eagerly.

"All the better test to his affection," replied Rose, brightly. "You would, of course, have to confess to the gentleman our little joke, and if he really loved you he would marry you still; and I would give you a wedding present of £10,000 to keep you from being too dependent on your husband; but if he did not love you, Lena, you would be better without him, whoever he was."

"You are a darling!" said Eleanor, "and I am so, so grateful to you for all your kindness to me, and I wish I could repay you for all your goodness by doing something for you in return."

"You will be doing a great deal for me in pretending you are the mistress of Fairmead Abbey," said Rose, wickedly; "and I will tell you why I say so. The truth is, there is a certain young man down at Wethereton who is most anxious to make my acquaintance."

"How do you know?" asked Eleanor, eagerly.

"My poor father wrote and told me so. His name is Hubert Carrington, and when his pater dies he will be a baronet!"

"But how does he know anything about you?" inquired Eleanor with interest.

"Well, Sir John Carrington and my dad were great friends, and they seem to have settled between them that it would be a beneficial thing for all parties if Mr. Carrington and I were to make a match of it. No doubt poor old father thought it would be very nice to see me Lady Carrington in years to come; but I object to having a husband found for me, especially when I feel convinced the Carringtons only want me because I am well off. It cannot be because they like me, for we have never met, and I know some people who are acquaintances of theirs, and they say they are as poor as churchmice!"

"That is funny!" laughed Eleanor, "and this fortune-hunting young aristocrat will propose to me instead; and what a sell it will be for him when he finds out I am the wrong girl!"

"Yes, I can see some amusing scenes ahead; but we must keep our own counsel, Lena, and not tell anyone our secrets!"

"You can trust me," said Eleanor. "I shall be silent for my own sake. And now, let us go and find Auntie, to ask her to spare me to you for a year. I am longing to be off!"

And very soon the arrangements were made, and Rose wrote to her housekeeper at Fairmead Abbey to have everything ready for herself and Miss Framley by the following Wednesday afternoon, as she intended to return home for good on that day; and then

she persuaded Mrs. Hammond to let Eleanor go with her to London to replenish their wardrobes, promising to pay for all Lena had, and when they arrived in the metropolis Rose went straight to Jay's, and bought Eleanor a handsome outfit of crapes mourning, to enable her to act her part with more effect, and they ordered her things to be sent down direct to Wethereton, because they did not wish Mrs. Hammond to see the costumes they had chosen.

CHAPTER II.

MISTRESS OF FAIRMEAD ABBEY.

When Sir John heard that Rose had arrived at Fairmead Abbey, he gave Lady Carrington no peace until she had called on her, and made her promise to be as friendly to her as possible, for Hubert's sake.

Eleanor was at home when he called, and acted the hostess well. She was a fascinating girl, and on this occasion she did her best to make herself agreeable, and her ladyship was much taken with her.

Rose had been a while, but she came in before Lady Carrington left, and Eleanor introduced her as her friend, Miss Framley, and when she left the room to take off her things, Eleanor said that Rose, like herself, was an orphan, and that she was going to remain at Wethereton for some time as her companion; and from various remarks that Eleanor made, Lady Carrington understood that Rose was dependent on her kindness, notwithstanding her of her in consequence; and at last her ladyship said good-bye, and returned to Carrington Hall in time to welcome her second son Egbert, who had been travelling abroad with a tutor for the last two years, and he was now returning to England, his education being completed.

Egbert was twenty years of age, and even better looking than his brother; but there was an indefinable expression about his face which made many people mistrust and even dislike him; and yet, when he chose to make himself pleasant, there were few who could resist his charms. Although he was a pleasure-seeking idle young fellow, without a thought beyond his own personal pleasure and amusement, his father made him a very handsome allowance, but it was never sufficient for him, and Sir John was always being called upon to pay his debts. He did pay them, and Egbert was looked upon by his own friends as a generous and honourable man. He now intended to settle down, and young though he was, he made up his mind to marry as soon as possible, and his greatest requirement in his wife was money. That was what he wanted more than anything else in the world. So when he heard Sir John mention Rose Dalford as the mistress of Fairmead Abbey, while they were having dessert at home, he became interested at once.

"Is she very good-looking, pater?" he asked.

"Your mother says so," he replied. "She called there to-day, but I have not seen her yet."

"Is she going to live at the Abbey?" he inquired, "for I should think she would be very dull there!"

"Miss Dalford has wisely brought a companion," said Lady Carrington, "so I hope she will not feel lonely!"

"I suppose the companion is very old and ugly?" said Hubert, smiling.

"No, not at all; she is about Miss Dalford's age, and a very sweet-looking girl," replied Lady Carrington.

"Here's a chance for Wethereton," said Egbert. "I have not seen a pretty woman in the neighbourhood yet, and I feel quite anxious to know them. Can't you ask them to dinner, mother?"

"No, not at present!" returned Lady Carrington. "They would hardly care for me to take them by storm in that way; they

must have time to return my visit first, and then in a week or two I will invite them."

But Egbert was not satisfied, and he was determined he would lose no time in becoming acquainted with Rose Dalford. But how was he to do it? That was what puzzled him; and he lay awake some hours that night thinking the matter over, but he could not find any possible plan for introducing himself to her. But the next morning fortune favoured him.

He was walking slowly down the wooded path where the two estates joined, when the laughter of girlish voices struck upon his ear, and he paused to listen; and, peeping through a gap in the hedge, he saw Rose and Eleanor amusing themselves with an old swing they had found fixed to two trees. It was Rose who was in the swing, and Eleanor was sending her up as high as she could; and Egbert stood spell-bound with admiration at the beauty of the picture before him, when suddenly, as Rose was in mid-air, the rope broke, and she fell with one cry to the ground. In a second, Egbert had jumped the hedge, and was standing beside her.

"I was walking down the wood-path," he said, "and I saw the accident, and came to see if I could be of any use."

"Thank you," said Eleanor, with a blanched face; "then tell me first if she is alive or dead!"—and the thought of Rose being dead made large tears come into Eleanor's eyes and course silently down her cheeks.

"Do not cry!" said Egbert, with genuine feeling. "Let us hope for the best," and kneeling down beside Rose he felt her pulse, and it was still beating.

"She is alive," he said. "I think she has only fainted."

"I hope so," said Eleanor, eagerly; "and now will you remain here while I call some of the servants to help me to carry her home?"

"I will carry her myself," replied Egbert, eagerly; and he raised the insensible girl in his arms and took her across the lawn with the greatest ease; and the French window of the drawing-room being open, Eleanor asked him to take her in that way, and let her rest on the sofa until she was better; and, as he laid her gently down, she gave a low moan as if she was in pain; but she was not conscious enough to tell them where it was.

"I will send you a medical man if you will allow me," said Egbert Carrington, gently; "and I will return in the afternoon and inquire after the sufferer."

"Thank you very, very much," said Eleanor. "I think she ought to see one as soon as possible, and I shall be very grateful if you will fetch one."

"I will go at once," he replied, "and if there is anything else I can do, please tell me, and I shall be only too pleased to help you."

"There is nothing more that I can think of," said Eleanor; "and I am so much obliged to you for so kindly coming to assist me. I do not know what I should have done without you."

"I am sincerely glad to have been of use to you," he returned, courteously. "I am only sorry the accident should have occurred, and my mother will be grieved to hear of it too. Who shall I tell her is ill?" he asked, smiling, as he remembered he did not even know who it was he was taking such an interest in.

"You may tell Lady Carrington that Miss Framley is hurt," replied Eleanor, colouring; "and now if you are really going for a doctor I think you should not lose time."

"You are right," replied Egbert. "Good-bye!" And after clasping Eleanor's extended hand he left the room, and, hurrying down the avenue, he was quickly at the Lodge gates; and once on the high road, it was not long before he was standing in front of Dr. Carlo's mansion, and was soon admitted by a neat-looking parlour-maid.

Dr. Carlo had been a friend of the Carringtons for the last ten years; in fact, ever since he had taken the practice at Wetherton, and

he was very pleased to see Egbert again, and invited him to remain and lunch with him.

But when he learnt the cause of Egbert's visit, he changed the invitation from lunch to dinner, and went off without delay to Fairmead Abbey, and before many minutes had elapsed he was by Rose's side, and soon discovered she had broken her collar-bone, but was not otherwise injured, and after helping her up to her own room, he waited in another apartment until she was in bed; then, with as much gentleness as possible, he set the bone, and remained with her for some time, and did his best to make her forget her pain, by telling her some amusing anecdotes.

Then he gave Eleanor all necessary instructions and went away, promising to return in the evening to see how Rose was getting on; and, somehow, all through the day her sweet face seemed to haunt him, and his patients, for the first time, complained that he was absent-minded, and many were curious to know the reason why, but could not find out.

Dr. Carlo was thirty-five, and a great favourite with all who knew him. He was courteous to everyone, and intensely gentle and sympathetic to those who were ill, and never seemed tired of listening to the long accounts of their ailments, both real and imaginary. Thus all his patients loved him, and thought him perfect, and there were many blushing maidens, and saucy widows, who would have considered themselves fortunate, indeed, to have gained his love.

But up till then he had never met the woman whom he could make his idol, and he never intended to marry until he did, although he liked all women and enjoyed their society; but after one look into Rose's beautiful eyes, and one touch of her soft, white hand, he felt she was different from any girl he had ever seen, and he knew that very soon she would be more to him than all the world.

When Egbert told his parents at luncheon about Rose's accident, Sir John Carrington heard it with a clouded brow, for it was not at all his wish that his second son should gain for himself all the treasures of Fairmead Abbey, knowing that their family would reap no benefit by the alliance, and that even Egbert, with his extravagant habits, would not be much the better for the fortune in a few years' time.

"Of course you were obliged to assist them as you were so near?" said Sir John, "but I do not wish you to grow too intimate with either of the young ladies."

"Why not?" inquired Egbert; "I can tell you they are both girls worth knowing."

"Possibly," replied Sir John, "and in time we shall all become acquainted with them. As it is, your mother shall go there this afternoon, and ask after Miss Framley, and see if there is anything she can do for her—won't you, my dear?" he continued, looking at his wife.

"With pleasure," replied Lady Carrington, "for I feel very sorry for her, and it will also be a trouble to Miss Dalford to have her ill."

Hubert Carrington expressed his regret for the sufferer, and then was silent upon the subject, for he noticed his brother's animated face, and Sir John's look of displeasure, and could not help being amused, for he guessed how the land lay, and that there were plenty of storms ahead.

Lady Carrington, in obedience to her husband's wishes, called at Fairmead Abbey to inquire after Rose; and in her kind, motherly way she soon won the hearts of the two girls, for she had asked permission to visit the invalid, and remained for some time talking to her and Eleanor, holding Rose's hand the while, in a gentle and kindly manner; and every afternoon, while Rose was in bed, she went to her company, while Eleanor took her daily walk; and generally in those walks she was met by Egbert Carrington, who was always so winning and courteous to her that she soon grew to feel the sunshine of his presence, and to pine in the days she did not see him.

CHAPTER III.

"I DARE NOT RISK IT YET."

WHEN Rose was well again she and Eleanor were invited to Carrington Hall to early dinner, and both felt extremely surprised to find that Egbert was not the only son; and Eleanor felt a shade of disappointment that even if she should gain the man she loved he had very little chance of being a baronet. But she quickly put the thought aside, and tried to feel glad for Rose's sake, telling herself it would be a happy thing for them both if they could marry the two brothers; and the look of interest that passed over Hubert's face when he was introduced to Rose made her think that more impossible things than that might happen.

Lady Carrington and Sir John gave them a hearty welcome, and the *recherche* meal was enjoyed by them all. And when it was over the four young people strolled out into the garden to see the flowers, while Sir John retired into his study to have his usual hour's rest. And Lady Carrington, who had some pressing letters to write, asked them to excuse her accompanying them, saying they would find her in the drawing-room whenever they were tired of walking about.

They all talked merrily for some time, then Hubert suggested showing Rose their quaint old summer-house; and Egbert led Eleanor away down the moss-grown path to see the aviary full of a curious mixture of birds. And very pretty it was, for it was made with finely-meshed zinc wire, about forty feet high and sixty broad. In the centre stood a grand old evergreen oak, and round the trunk of the tree, water was arranged about four yards wide, with gold fish swimming about in it; and fountains were continually kept playing into it to keep the water fresh; then came a border of grass, and the rest was gravel.

Baskets of ferns were suspended everywhere, and there were coco-nut shells hung in all directions to keep the birds warm in winter, and for them to make nests of in the summer, if they preferred them to the tree. And there were many kinds of the feathered pets to be seen there. All sorts of finches, with their various coloured plumage; canaries, looking like balls of gold; impudent little sparrows, and the red-breasted robins, and all as tame as they could possibly be.

"Oh, how lovely they are!" exclaimed Eleanor, enthusiastically. "I do wish we had one at the Abbey!"

"I am glad you like them," replied Egbert, smiling. "They are my mother's favourites, and she spends many an hour training them to come to her. I believe they all know their names now; and whenever she goes inside the cage and calls them, they fly around her, and eat out of her hand."

"She must enjoy it very much," said Eleanor. "It is pleasant to feel oneself loved, even by some tiny birds."

"I do not think you need feel the lack of love," returned Egbert, courteously. "There are few who could know you, Miss Dalford, without admiring and liking you."

"Do you think so?" said Eleanor, sadly. "I assure you I often feel very lonely, for I have not many to care for me, and, having no parents, makes a terrible blank in my life."

"I should fancy it did," answered Egbert, gently. "I do not know what I should do without my mother. Of course I am very fond of the pater too, but he has such an uncomfortable manner of asserting his authority, which is most aggravating, and makes me want to kick over the traces; but mother is always kind, and only tries to persuade me to do what she thinks right. And that is the way to manage a fellow, to my mind."

"Yes, I should think she was very nice!" replied Eleanor, warmly. "I wish I had a mother like her!"

"Do you?" said Egbert, eagerly; "then let her be a mother to you, Rose."

Lady Carrington might object to the arrangement," replied Eleanor, brightly.

"I think not," replied Egbert, smiling, "for she always speaks of you with much affection. And Rose, my darling, I love you, and without you by my side, I should take no interest or pleasure in anything. And now tell me, sweet one, that you can give me heart for heart;" and he paused to hear her answer, taking her hand in his, and looking tenderly at her.

Eleanor's eyes drooped beneath his gaze; she knew she had already given her love to the man beside her, and yet she hardly dared to tell him so, knowing she was deceiving him. She longed to tell him her secret, yet refrained from doing so for fear of losing him altogether, for his love meant so much to her; and to be parted from him would mar the whole of her life's happiness, and she turned away from him with tear-dimmed eyes.

"Rose, my precious one, what is it?" he asked, gently, as he placed his arm around her and drew her nearer to him. "Darling, I cannot let you go," he continued, as she tried to free herself from his embrace, "you must and shall love me, Rose," and he pressed his lips to hers, giving her a long, passionate kiss. "Tell me you love me!" he whispered, "Rose, you cannot deny that you do?"

"Yes, I love you!" she returned, almost sadly; "perhaps even more than you do me, for I should love you, rich or poor, in a high position or a lowly one."

"So would anyone who really loved," he replied; "but, all the same, it is pleasanter to be rich, is it not?"

"Egbert, would you care for me any the less if I were poor?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"What an absurd question!" he said, evasively. "It is rather impossible to imagine you impecunious, Rose, so we needn't worry ourselves about the subject."

"I wanted to know the depth of your affection," replied Eleanor, colouring.

"Then you shall soon learn it," he returned, laughing, and he kissed her again and again; and she surrendered her whole heart to him, and promised to love him to the end of her life.

"That is right, dear one!" he said, a smile of satisfaction passing over his handsome face, as he considered what a splendid future he had before him as the owner of Fairmead Abbey. "And now, Rosie, tell me, can you keep a secret for a little while?"

"What is it to be?"
"Well, the fact is, Rosie, I think it will be better not to tell the pater of my love for you until I am of age, for he might think I was too young, and I should not like him to raise any objection, and we shall be just as happy, darling, for I can run in and see you every day, and you will be welcome here as often as you care to come. Do you mind waiting a year, pet?" he inquired, eagerly, seeing Eleanor turn pale.

"A year is a long time to look forward to!" she returned, sadly, "and I thought you said your mother should be mine; but if she does not know of our love for each other, I cannot come here very often; but it can't be helped, I suppose," and again the dread of losing him came into her mind, and made her feel sadder than ever.

She had hoped he would have announced their engagement at once, and that she could have made them all so fond of her, that when the truth of her position came to light, they would have all forgiven the part she had played. As it was, she feared her lover's anger, with no one to plead for her; and again the tears dimmed her eyes.

"My darling, have I upset you?" he said, tenderly. "I am so, so sorry; but, indeed, my plan is the best, for, you see, as the second son, I have to be very careful to keep in favour, and I know if I offend my father, he will stop my allowance, and that would never do, would it? For you can understand I should not like to be dependent on my wife for everything, should I?"

"Perhaps not," said Eleanor, colouring

again. "It certainly would be better for you to have something of your own!"

"I only wish I had a couple of thousand a year, and I would run off with you at once!" said Egbert, smiling down at the pretty upturned face before him, and at the time he really meant what he said. But he knew it would be useless to attempt to marry Eleanor without his father's sanction unless he married her secretly, and that he never dreamed she would consent to.

He knew it would be hopeless to ask his parent's permission to allow him to be engaged to her, for he had been fully told by Sir John that it was his wish that Hubert should gain Rose Dalford, and retrieve the family fortunes with her money; and so he determined to win her in secret, and wait for a suitable opportunity to acknowledge her to the world as his future wife.

In the meantime he would enjoy her society to the greatest extent, and as he thought of the treasure he had secured for himself he clasped her closer to his heart.

"Well, darling!" he said, joyously, "you are very silent. Are you thinking you cannot remain true to me for a whole twelvemonth?"

"I shall love you while I have life!" she replied, simply. "You need not fear that I shall change!"

"I am glad of that, dearest," he answered, warmly. "And now tell me what you would like my first present to be to you? Perhaps it would hardly be judicious to give you a ring. Do you think it would, pet?"

"No, I do not think it would," she returned, smiling; "so I should like a double heart to wear with a little chain around my neck, inside my dress, and one must be of silver and the other of gold, as emblems of your love and truth, and on each heart I should wish the letter E engraved."

"Very well, darling, you shall have it," he answered, kindly; "but don't you think it would be better to have E on one and R on the other? That would stand for both our names, you see."

"Oh, no!" she replied, hastily; "I should much prefer the two E's. You will have it made so, won't you, dear?"

"Yes, if you really wish it," he returned; "and I will write up to London and order it to be made at once, and you shall have it in a few days."

"I shall be so pleased to get it," she replied, "and I shall always wear it for your sake. And now, don't you think we ought to join the others? Sir John may have awoke, you know, and be looking for us."

"Yes, I think it would be wise to go back; and if any remark is made upon our long absence we will say I have been giving you a full description of all the birds. Do you understand, Rosie?" he asked, laughing.

"Quite," she returned, with a saucy look; "and you have especially illustrated how they make love, have you not, Egbert?"

"I have tried to, dear," he answered, with a tender look, "and I hope you will never forget my lesson on the subject."

"There is no chance of my forgetting it," she answered, with a touch of sadness in her voice. And then they walked slowly back to the summer-house, and found Rose and Hubert Carrington still talking happily together.

They had very greatly enjoyed their conversation, and seemed mutually pleased with each other; and they both felt quite sorry when their cosy chat was interrupted by the appearance of Eleanor and Egbert.

"We have been looking at the birds," said Eleanor, brightly. "What lovely little things they are. Would you like to see them?" she asked, appealing to Rose.

"Very much," she replied, rising. And they all four walked round to the aviary.

Rose was just as charmed with it as Eleanor had been; and after having looked at the birds for some time they passed on to the other side of the grounds, and down to the water's edge, and, getting into the punt, they rowed

down the stream into the Fairmead estate; for the Ripple ran through the whole of Wetherton, and on, from village and town, to the sea beyond.

"There is some splendid fishing here," said Egbert; "have you tried it yet, Miss Dalford?"

"No," replied Eleanor; "I should like to do so very much, but at present we have not a boat, and I do not care for fishing from the bank."

"I will bring you round our punt if you will use it," said Egbert, "and we will have some good sport. Shall I come to-morrow?"

"Yes, do!" returned Eleanor, gaily; "I should enjoy it so much. And will you come too, Mr. Carrington?" she asked, turning to Hubert. "If you will, we can have a merry party, and make a little picnic of it, and have our luncheon on the lawn."

Hubert looked at Rose, to see if she wished him to accept the invitation; and as she smiled her approval, he said he should like to come very much. And so it was decided that they should all meet on the same spot at twelve the next morning.

Then they returned to the Hall, and found Lady Carrington waiting for them in the drawing-room, with the afternoon tea already drawn.

They told her the arrangements they had made for the following day, and she was pleased to see them all so happy together, and did not throw any obstacle in their way. And shortly after Sir John joined them, and conversation turned to general subjects; and about five o'clock Eleanor and Rose took their departure, after having thoroughly enjoyed their afternoon.

"Well, Lens," said Rose, as soon as they were once more in their own comfortable boudoir, "have you any news for me?"

"I do not understand your question," replied Eleanor, blushing.

"Don't you, dear! Then why look so guilty?" returned Rose, laughing; "but I won't torment you, if you would rather not tell me your secrets; but you and Egbert Carrington both looked so remarkably bright when you came back after your walk, that I made up my mind he had asked you to fix the wedding-day."

"Egbert and I are capital friends," answered Eleanor, evasively, "and I hope that you and Hubert will be the same."

"I hope so too," replied Rose, honestly; "and if I had only known what a nice fellow he is, I do not think I should have come down in a false position."

"He, at any rate, cannot be angry to find you are *wich*," said Eleanor, warmly, "although he might object to find you were poor."

"Not if he *really* loved me, Lens; and if, as I believe, Egbert Carrington cares for you, he will not mind finding out you are not well off."

"I don't know that," replied Eleanor, crossly; "and it will be very unpleasant to have to confess that I have deceived him."

"If you look upon it in that light," said Rose, gently, "tell him the truth at once, before it is too late; it cannot matter now one way or the other."

"It can matter very much," said Eleanor, with the tears starting to her eyes, "and I wish—I wish—I had never come here."

"I am sorry you regret it, Lens; you thought it would be great fun before you came, and I have done my best to make you happy. I believe it was a mistake for us to change places; but we only did it for a joke, and I do not think anyone could blame us very much if we don't carry it on too long; and if you will agree to my doing so, I will go this evening to Lady Carrington, and tell her the whole truth, and ask her to relate it to her husband and sons."

"Oh! no, no; not yet, not yet!" pleaded Eleanor, sobbing; "promise me you will not mention the secret to a soul until I wish it; do promise, Rose," she continued, passionately.

"What reason have you for keeping our secret any longer?" asked Rose, caressing her tenderly, for she saw that something was troubling her, and she wanted to comfort her if possible.

"Because," answered Eleanor between her tears, "if I lost Egbert now it would break my heart."

"Do you love him so very much, Lena?"

"Yes, Rosie; I love him with my whole soul, and I want to make him *really* care for me before I tell him the truth; then perhaps he will forgive me for playing the part I have done."

"Lena, are you engaged to him?" asked Rose, gently.

"Do not question me, dear," she replied, wearily; "it can do no good to know."

"If his intentions are honourable, why should he make a *mystery* of his affection for you?" said Rose, warmly. "If he intends to marry you, Lena, he should acknowledge you to his family at once."

"He does not wish to say anything about me to his parents until he is of age," replied Eleanor, "and that will be in a little less than a year, and, before then, you or I must tell him the true state of affairs."

"I cannot see why he should wait till he is twenty-one. It seems to me a lame excuse, Lena."

"Not at all," said Eleanor, hotly; "he is afraid Sir John would not give his consent till then."

"Sir John certainly ought not to object," replied Rose, "for Egbert is not even his heir, and will have simply nothing of his own to live upon; and the £10,000 I have promised you on your wedding day should make you comfortably off."

"It would more than content me, dear," she returned, sadly; "but I dread Egbert knowing I have deceived him. I would give half my life not to have done it, for I believe he will never forgive me."

"I am certainly sorry we have done so," replied Rose, quietly; "but if you take my advice you will let him know the truth at once; there is no time like the present."

"I cannot," said Eleanor, weakly. "I dare not risk it yet, so promise me you will be silent too."

"If you wish, dear," replied Rose, quietly; "but I believe it would be better to give him your confidence."

"No, no!" said Eleanor, "let me try and be happy for a short time, at least;" and again she began to cry passionately; and Rose, seeing it was useless to talk any further on the subject, changed the conversation without delay.

(To be continued.)

THE GOLDEN HOPE.

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CHAPTER XXI.—(continued.)

HELLICE followed slowly, but before she had reached the door Andrew Forsythe came out from the library and approached her, holding out his hand. She took it and clung to it.

"You come from her?" she whispered. "Did she—Lady Redwoode—send me any message?"

"None whatever!"

"She thinks me wicked, false, and vile! She thinks I would have killed her!" moaned Hellice.

"She thinks so, but you have a friend and advocate in me, Hellice," said Mr. Forsythe, warmly. "I know you are innocent, and I will prove you so—"

"It would break her heart if she thought ill of Cecile! Say nothing, Mr. Forsythe, unless it be to clear me in Sir Richard Haughton's eyes. Don't let him think so ill of me!" pleaded Hellice. "I shall never forget that you refused to believe in my guilt. And now, good-bye!"

She drew her hand from his, ran down the steps, entered the carriage, taking a seat opposite Mr. Kenneth's, and they drove away.

From an upper chamber, to which she had retreated, Lady Redwoode, on her knees, and sobbing like one in mortal anguish, looked after the departing vehicle, and felt that the best part of her life had gone from her.

The drive to Wharton was speedily accomplished.

Hellice kept in her corner and maintained silence all the way. Once only she looked, and then it was to glance at Sea View. That glance comprehended a view of Sir Richard Haughton and his uncle on horseback, on the point of setting out for Redwoode.

From that moment she drooped like a wounded bird, and when they arrived at the Wharton station, Mr. Kenneth was obliged to lift her from the carriage as if she had been a helpless child. Her veil was thrown back to give her air, and Mr. Kenneth's heart softened as he saw how white and full of pain was her lovely face.

He took her into the waiting-room and left her while he proceeded to take two places to the station nearest his sister's home. He had scarcely disappeared when Margaret Sorel plainly attired, and without disguise, entered the room.

She had come to the station, expecting to meet her brother. She recognized Hellice at once, and knew from her appearance that something unusual had occurred—something that might affect the fortunes of Sir Richard Haughton and his betrothed. This idea was confirmed when Mr. Kenneth returned with his tickets. She saw by his manner that something was wrong, and she grew solicitous to comprehend it.

She was an energetic woman, and after a few minutes' reflection she proceeded to the booking-office and procured a ticket to the end of the route, determined to track Hellice's movements.

She had scarcely accomplished her object and returned to the waiting-room when the train came in, and Mr. Kenneth escorted his charge to one of the carriages. Margaret Sorel took possession of the next compartment, and the train started, bearing away the stricken Hellice and her guardian, and to the same destination Hellice's unknown and remorseless enemy.

CHAPTER XXII.

He lour'd on her with dangerous eye-gleance,
Showing his nature in his countenance.
—Spenser's Faery Queen.

They did not know how hate can burn
In hearts once changed from soft to stern;
Nor all the false or fatal zeal
The convert of revenge can feel.

—Byron.

SIR RICHARD HAUGHTON looked idly at the Redwoode carriage almost at the same moment when Hellice was regarding him with intense gaze, but no tender instinct warned him of the trouble that had overwhelmed his betrothed, no magnetic sympathy impelled him to dash after the receding vehicle and look upon the face of her who had brought joy and gladness to his life. Instead, after one wild glance, he turned to his uncle, who had just mounted, and said, gaily,—

"To-day, Uncle William, I am to see Hellice again! It seems to me that the sun shines more brightly than usual, and the air is a thousandfold sweeter. She will see you too—"

"And we will find out why she sent back your letters all carefully re-enclosed and redirected," answered Mr. Haughton, as they rode slowly down the avenue.

A shadow obscured the brightness of the Baronet's face, and he said, thoughtfully,—

"Hellice must have seen the pretended gipsy on the evening of our betrothal. I left

my darling in the conservatory where *she* had been while I went to share my joy with Lady Redwoode, and when I returned she had vanished. I have not seen her since. I am sure she must have encountered Margaret Sorel, who laid the blame of our divorce upon me, and perhaps told Hellice that I gave her my first, best love. It is false. That boyish fancy was not love. I must see Hellice to-day and set her doubts at rest. I shall demand an interview and accept no refusal. Oh, if I had only told her the story of my marriage when she asked me if I had ever loved before!"

Vain regret! A pang smote his heart suddenly, as if a faint consciousness of the consequences of his error had dawned upon him; he put spurs to his steed, and the two riders swept out of the Sea View grounds and dashed over the road towards Redwoode.

The ride was soon accomplished, and the riders dismounted at the great hospitable porch of the Baroness's dwelling, flung their reins to a groom, and were shown into a pleasant morning room.

The sun flooded the room with pleasant light, the deep windows were half filled with flowers, and in the midst of the floral display hung glittering cages in which gay-plumaged birds fluttered noisily and sang with riotous melody.

Despite the summer warmth and brightness of the scene, a shadow fell upon the spirit of Sir Richard, and, unable to compose himself, he paced backwards and forwards uneasily, the gravity of his face deepening, and a sudden fear taking birth in his heart.

"Perhaps Hellice's illness is worse!" said Mr. Haughton, infected by his nephew's manner. "The house seems like a funeral. Those flowers and birds there seem a mockery."

The Baronet was disturbed by this remark more than he would have liked to appear. He stepped forward to touch a bell-rope, that he might question one of the servants of the establishment, but his purpose was arrested by the entrance of Lady Redwoode. Her white, sad face, her sorrowing eyes, her patient sweetness of expression, as well as her heavy, sable robes, struck the ardent young lover like a heavy blow.

"Good Heaven!" he cried, catching at a chair for support. "Hellice is not—not dead?"

"Not dead, Sir Richard," said Lady Redwoode, coming up to him and putting her hand upon his arm, "not physically dead—yet dead to you and me!"

The young Baronet looked at her wildly and incredulously, as if he thought her senses wandering. Then he uttered a strange, hysterical sort of laugh, at the sound of which Lady Redwoode shuddered.

"Take me to her," he demanded. "Let me see her at once!"

"Hear what I have to say, Sir Richard," said the Baroness. "Sit down and listen to me."

She led him to a chair, gently forced him to be seated, drew a chair beside him, and said, hesitatingly,—

"I know not how to commence my story; Hellice has proved herself unworthy of your regard or mine—"

"It is false!" interrupted Sir Richard, involuntarily. "Hellice is an angel. Oh, Lady Redwoode, what does all this mean? Tell me that you are joking—merely trying my love for your niece. It is a ghastly joke, but say that it is one."

"Sir Richard, be calm. It is no joke. Do you not see that I have suffered?—that since yesterday I have known a terrible sorrow and bitterness? You, who have already suffered deeply at the hands of one woman, can you not bear a blow from another? Summon up your strength and courage, and listen to me before my courage fails me."

Looking into her lovely face, momentarily convulsed by a spasm of anguish, the Baronet

schooled himself to listen to her with apparent calmness.

He knew now that the revelation of some terrible sorrow awaited him, and already he felt the numbness of despair creeping over him.

"What is it?" he asked, hollowly. "Is she angry with me? Has she, in her anger, gone away with Mr. Forsythe and married him? Say the worst at once!"

"It is not that. Hellice is free," said the Baroness, unheeding the sigh of relief with which her remark was welcomed. "I do not know how to prepare you, Sir Richard, for the truth. You know that Hellice is of Hindoo blood. Her grandmother, Renée, is a half-caste woman, who was very handsome in her youth, and who attracted the attention of an officer of the East India Company. Her daughter, the daughter also of this officer, became my brother's wife. Renée is artful, unscrupulous, and full of dissimulation. So was her daughter. Hellice resembles both."

Sir Richard uttered a passionate protest, which passed unheeded.

Lady Redwood served herself to the tank before her. Taking the young man's hand, she reminded him of the will she had recently made; told him that on the previous evening her parting with her niece had seemed colder than usual, although her heart had been unusually tender towards her; told of the supposed conversation between the cousins; and then, with slow and faltering speech, related how she had been awakened from her first sleep by the struggle of the two girls beside her bed, how Cecile had detected Hellice in the act of attempting to poison her with some subtle Indian drug, and had saved her life.

She added that Hellice had not attempted to deny the accusation; that she had declared the contents of the phial to be deadly poison; and that she had not even offered one word in her own defence.

The young lover listened in silence, his fine face growing pale and stern, his blue eyes emitting an intense light, expressive of the most powerful repressed feelings. When she had concluded he said, decidedly,—

"There is some mistake, Lady Redwood. I will stake my life on Hellice's innocence. My poor little dove! Take me to her at once. She needs tenderness, love, and sympathy in her desolation. Take me to her!"

And he arose and moved towards the door with generous impatience.

"Sir Richard, think how short a time you have known her," said the Baroness, following him. "Do not let her beauty blind you to her faults—"

"I know her thoroughly," interrupted Sir Richard. "It does not require years to read a nature so pure and sweet as that of Hellice. I would trust her and cling to her though all the world forsook her! Come, lead me to her."

"I cannot, Sir Richard. She is gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes, I sent her away from Redwood this morning."

"Sent her away!" echoed the Baronet, with dilating eyes. "Sent away that weak, invalid girl? Sent her away in her sorrow and misery, in her heavy grief and physical weakness? What must she not have suffered! My poor wounded little girl! Where is she? Where is she?"

"That I cannot tell you, Sir Richard," said her ladyship, firmly, resolved to save the young enthusiast from mortifying himself at the shrine of an unworthy marriage. "Hellice can never be your wife. She would be an unsuitable bride for you as the actress whom you first wedded. You shall not, with my consent, degrade yourself by marrying Hellice. In the future you will thank me for my present firmness!"

In vain Sir Richard pleaded. Lady Redwood was inflexible to his prayers and his tears, for the thought of Hellice's desolation and misery brought tears to his stern eyes, unused as they were to weeping.

"It is useless to implore me, Sir Richard," said her ladyship. "Question Cecile, if you will, concerning her cousin. She will so enlighten you that you will be grateful for your escape."

"It is Cecile, then, who has wrought all this misery!" cried Sir Richard. "I thought I saw her hand in it. Lady Redwood, you have taken the viper to your heart and flung from you the priceless jewel. Remember my words. Let the relationship of these two young girls to you be what it may, it is Hellice who is the true and noble one. Your choice between them was a leap in the dark! You may have chosen rightly. But you may also have chosen wrongly. Heaven grant that Hellice may be restored to me; and poor, weak, and friendless as she is, I shall hold her more richly dowered than the heiress of all your wealth!"

Lady Redwood could not reply, but the words repeated themselves again in her mind—"your choice was a leap in the dark!" and she felt their truth and force with a painful sinking at her heart.

"A leap in the dark!" Yes, that was all. Her instinct had failed her at the critical moment. Chance and similarity of features had guided her choice. Perhaps, after all, the supposed guilty Hellice was her own child, and Cecile was the daughter of her brother.

She put these thoughts aside uneasily, as Mr. Haughton said, simply,—

"Cheer up, Dick. It's easy enough to find Hellice. She went by the train, and you and I will look for her. If we fail, we'll come home and finish my flying machine—"

"You are right, uncle," interposed Sir Richard, as he remembered the carriage that had passed Sea View. "We'll be off at once!"

He stopped only long enough to convince Lady Redwood that he did not blame her for her seeming harshness, that it was no boyish whim that impelled him to at once claim Hellice for his bride, and then he quitted the room, gained the porch, mounted, and rode away with his uncle.

Neither relaxed his speed until they had reached Wharton. They hastened to the station, learned that there would be no train before evening going in their direction, and ascertained also that a young lady answering to the description of Hellice had taken the early train northward, attended by Mr. Kenneth, who was well known at the station.

Sir Richard could scarcely restrain his impatience until evening. He spent the day at Wharton, secured two places in the train when the time drew near, and at last found himself whirling along through the early evening in search of his betrothed.

The uncle and nephew alighted at North Eldon—their destination—before it had grown late, and the latter hastened to make inquiries after the object of his search.

He learned from the guard that several persons had alighted from the early train, but that he had remarked no lady in particular, excepting a handsome brnette lady, whose bright cheeks and dark eyes had made her peculiarly attractive.

Knowing nothing of the pursuit of Margaret Sorel, Sir Richard very naturally supposed this description to refer to Hellice, whose dark loveliness could not well avoid attracting the man's observation. Full of hope, therefore, he set out to trace the handsome brnette, and was so successful as to discover that she had taken rooms at the village inn—the Eldon Arms.

He hastened thither with the speed of an ardent lover, discovered that she was not returned from a temporary absence, and, full of wonder, not unmixed with alarm at her singular movements, sat down in the parlour to await her return.

About the hour when Sir Richard and his uncle set out on their journey Cecile and Mr. Andrew Forsythe were in the drawing room at Redwood.

Lady Redwood bore them company, but she was wrapped in sad thoughts, and

sat apart, bearing no share in the conversation.

Mr. Forsythe had been endeavouring to make himself agreeable to the heiress, but her manner had become abstracted, and the conversation flagged beyond all power of reviving. The truth was, the hour appointed for Cecile's second meeting with Mr. Darcy Anchester had arrived, and she had become anxious to effect her escape from the room unseen.

Her anxiety had become plainly perceptible to Mr. Forsythe. He noticed the furtive glances that she now and then directed towards the conservatory, and at last he fancied he held the brown face of the Hindoo ayah rise from amidst the feathery foliage for one brief instant and then as quickly disappear.

He saw that his attentions had become irksome to the girl, and that she could scarcely restrain her impatience at their continuance.

He, therefore, with the evening that was a part of his nature, took up a book, glanced over it casually, and pretended to become gradually absorbed in its contents. His ruse was successful. Cecile arose, sauntered across the floor, and flitted into the conservatory. A moment later she had passed from sight.

Lady Redwood was quite unconscious of the little scene, and did not even observe Mr. Forsythe, as he also arose and carelessly entered the conservatory. As he expected, he found it deserted. The garden door was open, and he looked from it, beholding two cloaked figures flitting across the garden and making for the wood enclosing it.

"Cecile and her ayah," he thought, in surprise. "They are going to the Acacia Walk. What can be the meaning of their desire for secrecy? Perhaps they have some little secret in hand which it may benefit me to discover."

Acting on this thought, he waited until they had gained the shadow of the wall, and then he followed their steps, the shrubbery screening him from the eyes of any wandering servant. He gained the Acacia Walk, and crept along in its shadow, until he was very near Cecile and beyond the view of her sentinel.

Cecile paused a moment a few yards from him, and he could hear her murmur,—

"He has not come! What can be the meaning of his absence?"

The words were hardly uttered when a tall, almost gigantic figure appeared from the shadow behind the girl, coming into her view with sudden abruptness.

Cecile uttered a slight shriek.

"How you startled me!" she said, peevishly.

"You make quite a dramatic appearance!"

"You must have a bad conscience, Cecile," laughed Mr. Darcy Anchester, putting one arm around her and drawing her to his breast.

The girl impatiently freed herself, and exclaimed, imperiously,—

"No endearments between us, Darcy. I will not submit to the miserable mockery of them. There is no longer even the pretence of love between us. I came to meet you here the other evening full of love and ardor, believing that affection for me brought you hither from India. But when you avowed to me the truth that not love but ambition had brought you here—that you desired to make me your stepping-stone to wealth and position—and that you had no right to the noble name you bear—my love was turned to hatred—the most bitter and intense!"

She spoke the last words, hissing, and Andrew Forsythe, from his friendly shadows, knew that she meant them.

"Well, Cecile," responded Mr. Anchester, gaily, "it makes no difference whether the motive be fear or hate, so long as you are my slave. I've a hard and tight bit between your teeth, my little beauty, and I have no fears that your puny efforts can effect your freedom. You are in my power, Cecile—remember that!"

The girl drew her cloak closer under her chin, and her teeth chattered strangely for such a warm summer evening.

"Well," she said, in a subdued tone, "what do you want of me now?"

"I have made up my mind to hasten our marriage, Cecile," was the careless reply. "I received a letter from my father to-day, and he tells me to come to his place and he will see what he can do for me. He hints at a handsome provision, and you may be sure that I shall reject nothing that will add to my income. I may be absent a month. He has invited me for that period, and I am to pass for the son of a friend in India. At the end of a month, then, I shall return to claim you as my wife!"

"Lady Redwoode will never consent to such a marriage!" said Cecile, desperately.

"You must convince her that your happiness depends upon it," replied Mr. Anchester, coolly. "Tell her you cannot do without me. If she remains deaf to your pleadings, we must make a stolen marriage! There is no escape for you, Cecile."

The girl did not plead for a respite, for she knew pleadings would be useless. Her features became set in a hard expression, and her eyes sparkled strangely, as if, were the opportunity given her, she would free herself from Mr. Anchester's power at once and forever by a blow that would deprive him of life.

"It is settled, then?" said Mr. Anchester. Cecile bowed her head in silence.

"Now tell me how affairs go on at Redwoode!" said her promised husband, jovially. "Does her Ladyship dote on her golden-haired daughter? Does Hellice play poor Cinderella? I shall have to look after our pretty Hellice when I become master of Redwoode."

"Hellice has gone away," returned Cecile, in a cold, hard tone, that was strangely metallic.

"Gone away? Where, if I may ask?" and Mr. Anchester looked incredulous.

"I don't know where. She tried to poison mamma last night, and so she has been sent away in disgrace. She crept into mamma's room, and would have killed her if I had not followed and rescued my dear mother!"

"A fine story!" sneered Mr. Anchester. "So Hellice tried to 'poison mamma,' did she? I suppose you are the chief witness against her?"

"I am!" said Cecile, defiantly.

"I thought so," said her betrothed, quietly. "I like your spirit, Cecile. You had but to determine that your rival should be dismissed in disgrace, and lo! it is accomplished! Of course, I understand the whole matter. I suppose that Lady Redwoode regards Hellice with proper horror, and will never leave her a penny to bless herself with, as the saying goes?"

"Never!" said Cecile, energetically.

"Very good. You are exceedingly clever, Cecile, but beware about trying your cleverness against me. I am on my guard!" declared Mr. Anchester, warningly. "I don't doubt but you are fertile in resources, but you must work with me, not against me! Remember that I heard the three several communications of the dying Mr. Glintwick to you, Renee, and Hellice!"

Cecile shuddered and faltered a denial of any designs against Mr. Anchester, whom she professed herself willing to marry at the time appointed.

"I believe you," said Mr. Anchester, with a sardonic smile. "I shall come to Redwoode one month from to-day. I shall not meet you secretly, but inquire for you at the mansion. You will introduce me to Lady Redwoode as your friend. If she refuses to smile upon my suit, we must run away together and be married somewhere else. Remember, I hold your fate in my hands!"

With these words he glided away as suddenly as he had appeared, leaving the girl stupefied and overwhelmed at his declarations. She wrung her hands in dismay at the fate before her, and trembled in anticipation of absolute ruin.

"If he were only dead!" she cried aloud.

"I am on the brink of an awful gulf! Who can save me? Oh, for a friend to help me!"

Again she wrung her hands, and a voice arose in a wail that rang through the wood, startling the birds, and frightening Renee into a paroxysm of fear.

The cry had scarcely died away when she felt a heavy hand on her shoulder. With a shriek, she sprang aside, and found herself face to face with Andrew Forsythe, whose countenance shone with an evil and triumphant meaning. She comprehended, in one brief instant, that he had overheard her interview with Mr. Anchester, that the toils she had so skillfully woven were discovered, that instead of one enemy she had two, and, with one wild moan, the guilty creature sank into a swoon at his feet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I will commune with you of such things
As want no ears but yours. —*Shakespeare.*

To which the gods must yield; and I obey.
—*Beaumont and Fletcher.*

Mr. Forsythe stooped and raised the prostrate figure of Cecile from its position on the ground at his feet, and bore it to a wooden bench near at hand, one of a row that lined the walk at intervals. He had scarcely accomplished this task, and had not yet made an attempt towards the recovery of the maiden from her swoon, when the ayah came running up, breathless and frightened, pushing him aside as if he had been a meddlesome child. She bent over her darling, murmuring words in Hindostance, which of course Mr. Forsythe failed to comprehend, chafed the small, lifeless hands, kissed the pallid brow in a distracted sort of way, and finally, as she grew calmer, she drew from her pocket a tiny jewelled vinaigrette, which she held to the nostrils of her young mistress. The pungent salis it contained, added to Renee's previous exertions, quickened the returning consciousness of Cecile; she moved slightly and uttered a low, faint moan of terror.

Mr. Forsythe retreated a few steps, watched the scene with folded arms, and with a strange smile on his sinister countenance.

"My darling, my sweet one!" said Renee, softly, in the musical accents of her native tongue. "Look up and tell me who has dared to whiten the cheeks Renee loves so well—who has dared to frighten my blue-eyed birdling into the semblance of the dead?"

The voice and the words completed Cecile's restoration to consciousness. She opened her eyes and lifted her head from her attendant's bosom, looking around her with a wild and frightened gaze.

"Where is he, Renee?" she asked. "Is he not here? Was it all a dream?"

"Who, my darling? Darcy?"

"Hush, Renee! It is not Mr. Forsythe here?"

"He is?" said Mr. Forsythe, answering for himself, as he stepped out of the friendly shadows that had enwrapped him.

Cecile uttered a faint scream, and clung convulsively to her attendant, who turned upon the intruder a glance full of anger and menace.

"Pardon my abruptness, Miss Cecile," said Mr. Forsythe, with an excess of politeness. "I had no intention of giving an unpleasant termination to your evening's stroll. Far be it from me to injure one hair of your head," and his voice grew singularly impressive. "Do not treat me as your enemy, for I am your friend—your best and only reliable friend!"

His tone gave a meaning to his words that went far to reassure Cecile. With a return of her usual courage, she withdrew herself entirely from the ayah's embrace, and said, with a forced smile:

"You will think me very weak, Mr. Forsythe, to faint at the sight of you. Probably you were as much startled at seeing me as I

was at seeing you. I must give up my love of evening walks. Shall we return to mamma?"

She looked at him furtively and anxiously, as if trying to discover from his face whether he had witnessed her interview with Darcy Anchester. But Mr. Forsythe's countenance was as expressionless as unchiselled stone.

"If you wish, we will return to Lady Redwoode," he answered, quietly. "But your present agitated appearance would alarm her, I fear. Take my arm, Miss Cecile, and let us walk up and down the avenue together until you are yourself again."

There was a tone of command underlying his invitation which Cecile was quick to perceive. With a faint shudder, and possibly a deepening paleness, she assented, and arose, taking his proffered arm.

"My darling!" said the Hindoo, anxiously and uneasily, "you are not able to walk. After frightening you so Mr. Forsythe ought to take you to the house. The night air—"

Cecile answered this remonstrance by a look which had the effect of quieting her nurse better than words could have done. The woman bowed her turbaned head weekly, her earring tinkling like fairy bells, but it was easy to see that though she was silenced she was not satisfied.

"Go back to the end of the walk," said Cecile, pleasantly, and with no outward indication of the trouble that lay heavy and rankling at her heart. "You can warn us of any approach. Go!"

Renee obeyed without a word. Cecile leaned more heavily upon Mr. Forsythe's arm, and permitted him to lead her up and down the Acacia Walk slowly, and for some moments in silence. The young man was the first to speak.

"What a remarkable influence you possess over that ayah of yours!" he said, carelessly, his glance resting upon the figure of the Hindoo, as she stood like a statue at the end of the walk, dividing her attention equally between her duties as sentinel and the young couple, whose present movements were half a mystery to her. "I never saw anything like her devotion to you. It is a remarkable freak in nature, is it not, that impelled her to prefer her fair-haired nursing to her own grandchild, who is, as I may say, a part of herself? When I see her hovering about you it reminds me of Una and her lion. This Hindoo is only a half-tamed tigress, but you can lead her with a silken string, Miss Cecile. She looked at me a few minutes since as if she would rend me with her teeth, and even now you can see that at a word from you she would gladly spring upon me in a deadly attack!"

Cecile looked up, her face strangely white, and her eyes glittering like polished steel in the dim light.

"Is this what you wished to say to me, Mr. Forsythe?" she remarked, in a tone she vainly endeavoured to render careless.

"Not exactly, but it may serve as an introduction to my remarks," replied her escort. "I have wondered that Renee did not accompany her granddaughter to her new home, which will be disagreeable enough, I don't doubt. But that Hindoo creature seems to be devoid of natural affection. All this, however, is only wandering from my subject. To come to the point at once, Miss Cecile, I must inform you that I noticed your departure from the drawing-room an hour or so since; that I suspected there was something involved in it more than was apparent; and that I followed you hither in time to witness your very interesting meeting and interview with Mr. Darcy Anchester, if I remember the name rightly!"

Cecile pressed her hands tightly about his arm, but she uttered no cry nor moan. There was no weakness in her heart as she listened to his assertion. She had expected it. His ease and carelessness of manner had not deceived her; and as she listened to his remarks about Renee she had nervously herself to meet calmly what she knew must follow. Every nerve now in her body was strung to its

utmost tension. Every faculty of her brain was on the alert. Her courage and powers of self-possession were fully exercised in this trying moment, and she appeared as unmoved as if the question under discussion were the most trivial one possible.

Mr. Forsythe was disappointed at her reception of his statement. After her recent displays of weakness he had expected to be treated to an exhibition of shrieks, moans, and tears. His respect for Cecile arose to a higher pitch, and he began to think that she would prove no mean antagonist, if she were resolute to oppose her strength to his.

"Well?" said the girl, inquiringly.

Mr. Forsythe was momentarily abashed at her coolness, but it did not require a long time to restore to him his feeling of supremacy.

"The gentleman is your lover, I suppose, who has followed you from India?" he said, quietly. "He called himself Anchester, and spoke of the marquis as his father. The eldest son of the marquis is younger than this man, and is at Oxford. I saw his name in the paper the other day as having been the winner in a boat-race. This lover of yours, then, is an adventurer, the nameless son of a dissolute peer, and he would make of you the ladder by which he hopes to climb to wealth and a social position! A pretty programme, truly, but one from which I should think the fastidious and equally ambitious Miss Cecile Avon would shrink in horror!"

"I do shrink from a union with him!" declared Cecile, involuntarily. "I hate him! I loathe him!"

"I do not wonder at your hatred of him," said Mr. Forsythe, sympathizingly. "No young lady, it seems to me, could think for a moment with pleasure of allying herself to such a man. But to one so ambitious as you—one who scruples at nothing to attain a high position, or to remove a dangerous rival from her path—it must be hideous torture even to think of marrying him!"

"I do not understand your allusions, Mr. Forsythe," said Cecile, trembling in spite of herself.

"Do you not?" inquired Mr. Forsythe, blandly. "Permit me then to enlighten you. Will it not be enough for me to say that I have not been blind to your career at Redwoode—that I have been cognizant of all your pretty arts to win Lady Redwoode's love and confidence, and to inspire her ladyship with distrust of your cousin? Will it be necessary for me to declare that I thoroughly comprehend the scene of last night, that I know Hellice to be innocent of all guilty intentions towards Lady Redwoode, and that I know you to have been the intended secret poisoner of the Baroness?"

"What language is this to me, Lady Redwoode's daughter?" demanded Cecile, with a show of just anger. "If I were to repeat your words to mamma she would expel you from the house—"

"But if I were to declare to her ladyship that I could offer proofs of my statements, what then?" said Mr. Forsythe, quietly. "You told Lady Redwoode that you followed Hellice to her room. I was standing on the upper landing and saw you creep into Lady Redwoode's rooms, and more than a minute later Hellice followed you. You were calm and collected, with a deadly purpose expressed in your manner. Hellice was pale, frightened, and distracted, intent on saving the Baroness and you also—the one from death, the other from exposure and remorse!"

Cecile could not find voice to reply. Her armour of courage was not strong enough to resist this new and unexpected shock. She was overcome, dumbfounded, paralyzed.

"I could say more than that," resumed Mr. Forsythe, with the air of one who feels himself master. "I could say to Lady Redwoode that she has been mistaken from the first in her estimate of your character; that it is Hellice who is noble, truthful, and good, and that you have been jealousy working against

your cousin from the moment of your arrival. You see I understand you thoroughly, Cecile. But to return to Mr. Anchester. You dare not defy him as you would like to do. He holds you in his power, and can crush you as easily as he could crush a shell in his hand. I know the secret of his power over you!"

"You do?" faltered the girl, shrinking from him.

"Yes, I do. You see now that you are more in my power than his—more at my mercy."

The wretched Cecile could scarcely comprehend the changed aspect of affairs. With a wild instinct for flight she endeavoured to tear herself from Mr. Forsythe's detaining clasp, but he held her fast, smiling at her vain struggles. She had not voice enough to call to Renee, of whose hidden casket of deadly drugs she thought longingly at that moment. If this new and terrible enemy could only be stilled for ever with one of those subtle poisons, she thought she could find strength to administer it to him herself.

A sudden thought gave her hope.

"Why have you told all this to me instead of going to Lady Redwoode?" she asked, abruptly, turning towards him, and regarding him with a haggard face, which looked years older than it had looked a minute before.

"Because we can be allies," was the prompt response.

"Allies! How so?"

"I will be frank with you—as frank as your uncouth Mr. Anchester," replied Mr. Forsythe, with a covert sneer. "To work together we must thoroughly understand each other. I have said that you are ambitious, that you will scruple at nothing to make yourself mistress of Redwoode and the heiress of my uncle's widow. Now I am ambitious too, and my ambition has the same end—to rule over the domain of Redwoode. There is more justice in my ambition than in yours. I come from the line of Redwoode, and my uncle intended to make me his heir. I do not complain of my aunt's treatment of me. She hoped to repair her injustice to me by bringing about a marriage between her daughter and myself. She is my best and truest friend, and I esteem her above all women—except one," he added, under his breath. "I would do anything, Cecile, anything that would make me master here. Suppose we join our hands and interests?"

"I do not understand you!"

"Suppose you become my wife, to speak more plainly?" said Mr. Forsythe, quietly.

"But you do not love me. You love Hellice!"

"You have guessed that secret, then? You are right—I do love Hellice. I make no pretence of loving you, Cecile, nor even of greatly admiring you. But you are clever, with a cleverness after my own heart. I like a bold, unscrupulous nature like yours. I shall not be obliged with you to feign a goodness I do not possess. Hellice is too good for me—besides, she refused me."

Cecile bit her lips angrily, and exclaimed,—

"Do you expect to win me when you woo with compliments like these, Mr. Andrew Forsythe?"

"Compliments are useless between us, Cecile. Do you not realize the fact? Shall I compliment you upon your goodness, sincerity, truthfulness, or generosity?" and Mr. Forsythe sneered. "It cannot be possible that you are aware of your imminent peril and yet bargain for idle compliments. Let me present the case to you clearly. Accept me, and you strengthen your position at Redwoode; you obtain an ally whose interests are identical with yours, and who has the advantage and prestige belonging to the name and race of Redwoode. Refuse me—"

"And what then?" inquired Cecile, as he made an impressive pause.

"Refuse me, and I will go to Lady Redwoode and declare everything I know to your disadvantage. This Mr. Anchester is an adventurer and a coward, who will do anything for money and social rank. I will frighten

him, bribe him, threaten him, and induce him to declare to Lady Redwoode that you are the daughter of Horatio Glintwick! So small a thing as this man's assertion would turn the evenly-balanced scales, and make the injured Hellice heiress of these wide acres!"

Cecile bowed her head that her enemy might not look upon her convulsed features. The anguish she had meted out to her wronged cousin returned to her own heart now in wild waves of fear and horror. She had gained a narrow pass in her life-history whence to return on her steps was impossible, and to advance was to plunge headlong into a mist of darkness no eyes could penetrate.

"I—I dare not!" she gasped.

"You would brave me, then?"

"Oh no, no, no!" Cecile almost shrieked. "I will pay you money, Andrew, any sum you may demand. When I become mistress here you shall have a princely income—"

"I ask only that you shall marry me," interrupted Mr. Forsythe, coldly. "The rest I can manage to suit myself!"

"But Mr. Anchester will return in a month to claim me. If he learns of our engagement he will denounce me!"

And Cecile wrung her hands in terror.

"Marry me before he comes. I will meet him and protect you from him. Marry me, and you cling to a rock of safety. Refuse me, and you go drifting down to certain destruction!"

Cecile calmed herself sufficiently to reflect upon these impressive words. She had no especial love for Mr. Forsythe, but she did not dislike him. No thought of love, however, entered her brain at this juncture. Her marriage had become a question of expediency, of safety, and not of girlish sentiment.

She thought briefly, keenly, and with stern firmness. She weighed carefully her chances on every side. There was no way of escape, that was plain. She needed protection from Darcy Anchester. She had dreamed of marrying a peer, of winning a title and social pre-eminence. Those dreams must be given up.

Of her two suitors Mr. Forsythe was the more eligible. His family was noble and irreproachable. His name was highly esteemed, although without a title. His mother had been a Lady of Redwoode, the daughter and sister of ruling barons. He was an especial favourite with the Baroness, who would, without doubt, dower her daughter handsomely on the occasion of her marriage with him.

A union with Mr. Anchester was not even to be thought of calmly. A nameless adventurer, a man whom she would be obliged to rescue from his ignoble sphere—no, she could not marry him.

It was strange that Cecile could at that moment weigh all these circumstances, but she did so with grave deliberation. As may be judged from the bias of her thoughts, her verdict was given in favour of her present suitor. She glanced at him, observing his black eyes and hair, his florid complexion, with some secret satisfaction that he was handsome, and said,—

"My choice is made, Andrew. If you will save me from Darcy Anchester I will be your wife."

"Within the month?"

"Within a fortnight, if you like!"

"It is settled, then," said Mr. Forsythe, coolly, as if he had known beforehand what would be her decision. "We will be married a fortnight hence. We will go on our bridal tour, and leave the field open during our absence to Mr. Anchester. When winter comes we will go to town for the season, and you can shine in society to your heart's content, while I follow my own devices. The matter is quite settled?"

"Quite so, Andrew."

"Then let us go in and announce our engagement to Lady Redwoode. She is doubtless wondering at our absence."

Cecile acceded to the proposal, and they moved down the avenue towards the mansion. Renee waited at the end of the walk until they came up, and Cecile, in the ayah's native tongue, communicated the fact of her engagement, and added, as the Hindoo scowled fiercely at Mr. Forsythe, that she was quite satisfied with the projected marriage.

"I read something like this in the stars this morning before Hellice came to your rooms," said the Hindoo. "I read of a sudden peril, a rescue, and a marriage, but the marriage was not a pleasant one, my pet. There came after it black shadows like troubles and sorrows. And last of all loomed up a cloud so large that it hid your star completely. What could that cloud have meant? Disgrace—death? Think twice, my golden-haired daughter of the sun, before you marry this son of Redwoods. Yet what is written is written, and there is no resisting fate!"

She ended her admonition with a tone expressive of blind resignation to what she believed to be the decree of destiny. Cecile had a vein of superstition in her nature, as has been said, and she shuddered at her ayah's prophecy, yet believed its frustration to be impossible.

"Well, Renee," she answered, with assumed gaiety, "I will live while I do live. I am going to taste every pleasure, be a queen in society, use my wealth with a lavish hand, and when that great cloud overtakes me I shall have no lost opportunities of enjoyment to lament."

With a forced laugh that did not deceive the troubled Hindoo, Cecile resumed her way with Mr. Forsythe. They paused a moment at a fountain in the garden, and the girl plunged her hands into the cool waters, upon which lilies, with their long green leaves, floated, and bathed her eyes, which betrayed marks of recent tears. The cool liquid seemed to refresh her weary brain, and her thoughts gathered strength and her heart renewed its courage during her brief delay by the fountain under the soft summer starlight.

She was quite herself again when, leaning on Mr. Forsythe's arm, she was conducted through the conservatory into the drawing-room and Lady Redwood's presence—astute, clear-headed, shrewd, with an eye to her own advancement, at the expense of anyone who might chance to stand in her way. She came in, her golden hair about her head in pretty dishevelment, frizzed into a thousand tiny spiral tendrils that stood out from her head like the burs around a chestnut; with a glow on her cheeks, a glow in her blue eyes, and a glow on her lips; with her pale blue robe trailing after her in shimmering waves, reflecting the light from the chandeliers; and with a rosebud in her hand which she had torn from its stem in passing through the flower-bordered aisles of the conservatory.

Beautiful she was without doubt, but one charm of beauty was lacking with Cecile. That sweet and tender shyness, that delicate modesty, that indefinable delicacy that distinguished Hellice, and which can be compared only to the bloom on the cheek of a peach, to the purple bloom on the untouched grape, was painfully missing.

Lady Redwood aroused herself at their entrance, and looked up at the young pair in surprise.

Mr. Forsythe led his betrothed directly to the Baroness, and said, smilingly,—

"Lady Redwood, permit me to introduce you to my promised wife. Cecile returns my affection for her, and we only need your blessing to complete our happiness."

Lady Redwood looked from one to the other in bewilderment. There was nothing of the confusion and embarrassment peculiar to young and ardent lovers in the manner of either. No conscious blush tinged Cecile's cheeks, no sweet, maidenly shame drooped her gaze. She looked as unconcerned as if she had been demanding a new bonnet, while Mr. Forsythe seemed to assume the air of a master.

"This is sudden," said her ladyship. "Are you sure you know your own hearts, my children? Do you love my daughter, Andrew, with the love that will endure always?"

Mr. Forsythe replied in the affirmative, while his thoughts wandered to a fairer form, a lovelier face than that by his side—the face of the wronged Hellice.

"And you, Cecile," said the Baroness, with increasing anxiety, "do you really love Andrew as a wife should love her husband—more than all the world beside?"

Cecile was about to reply as her suitor had done, but the thought that something more might be expected of her prompted her to assume a virtue she did not possess. She drooped her head, then moved forward and knelt beside the Baroness, pillowng her head upon her ladyship's bosom.

"I shall not be happy if you refuse your consent to our union, mamma," she murmured.

"Then it is granted," declared Lady Redwood, her pure, sweet face brightening. "I desire your marriage above all things, my children. I shall have no longer to reproach myself for defrauding Andrew of his expected inheritance."

She caressed her daughter tenderly, her pure Saxon loveliness transfigured into angelic beauty by her maternal love; but as she pressed her lips to Cecile's brow there came to her, as there had come a moment before to Mr. Forsythe, the remembrance of the delicate, dark face of Hellice, in its earnestness, purity, and sweetness, and she almost turned in sudden repugnance from Cecile, yearning for one whom she deemed unworthy of her thoughts.

"We wish to be married within a month—a fortnight," declared Mr. Forsythe. "Do not deny us, dear Lady Redwood."

"It is too soon, Andrew. You should wait a year or two, until Cecile has seen the world," replied the Baroness, collecting her thoughts.

Mr. Forsythe urged his wish with all the skill he could command, and Cecile seconded his pleadings ably. The result can be foreseen. Lady Redwood yielded to their united prayers, granting her consent to an immediate union, although she protested against their haste and precipitancy.

"You shall have your own way, my children," she said, cheerfully. "I hope that your love will always be as strong and ardent as it is now. You have my consent, and with it my blessing—the fondest, truest, tenderest blessing of which a mother's heart is capable."

The young pair bowed their heads before her to receive the blessing she invoked upon them, but she did not dream that both were false and deceitful, that they did not love each other or her, and that they had united themselves only that they might better work out their grasping and inordinate greed for wealth and position.

CHAPTER XXIV.

I had much rather use
A crested dragon, or a basilisk;
Both are less poison to my eyes and nature.
—Dryden.

The minutes deepened into hours, and still Sir Richard Haughton tenanted the little inn-parlour at North Eldon, not daring to leave it lest his betrothed should return to the inn in his absence, and too nervous and excited to remain tranquilly seated.

He walked to and fro with quick, impetuous tread, stopping now and then to look from the window in the vain hope of beholding the form of Hellice. He puzzled himself in vain conjectures as to the girl's business in that little country town, but failed to arrive at any satisfactory decision.

He had been cast adrift, he knew, and he sometimes fancied she had come to this secluded spot to engage in one of the few ways of gaining a livelihood open to a delicate and refined gentlewoman. Then he mentally ac-

quitted Lady Redwood of intentional injustice to her niece, and felt a conviction that a suitable home had been provided for his betrothed.

He summoned the landlord, and questioned him concerning his newly-arrived lady guest. The description of Margaret Sorel was not inapplicable to Hellice, although their styles of beauty were so totally different.

Sir Richard had no doubt that the "handsome brunette" so admirably praised was his own promised wife, especially when the landlord informed him that she had come from Wharton.

The hour began to grow late, the proprietor of the inn began to murmur against the mysterious absence of his lady guest, and Sir Richard felt tempted to rush out into the night and defend Hellice from a thousand imaginary perils.

Where could Mr. Kenneth be? He had not accompanied the brunette lady to the inn. Perhaps even now he was escorting Hellice to London, and this stoppage at North Eldon had been made solely to divert pursuit on the part of Hellice's lover.

Tortured by these fancies, the young Baronet made no attempt to satisfy the inquiries of his uncle, who wandered in and out of the inn like an uneasy spirit, only a little less anxious than his nephew.

At last, when his last vestige of patience had given place to the wildest anxiety, Sir Richard was inexpressibly relieved by the appearance of his host, who said,—

"The lady has come, sir. Shall I send up your name, sir?"

"No. You may send word simply that a friend wishes to see her. I will follow at your servant's heels," replied Sir Richard, determined that Hellice should have no opportunity to decline his visit.

The landlord bowed and withdrew.

"Stay here till I return," said the Baronet, addressing his uncle.

"Ask her to let me see her, if only for one minute, Dick!" cried Mr. Haughton, earnestly, the tears springing to his eyes. "Tell her I know she is an angel, Richard—an innocent, wronged angel! Do you think she'll see me?"

Sir Richard replied in the affirmative, and his answer turned his relative's grief into boyish delight. He did not linger to hear any more of the messages the poor gentleman would have sent, but with a firm, rapid step walked up the stairs to the upper chamber that had been assigned to the lady guest. At the door he paused, meeting the servant who had borne his message, but he did not address a word or look to him. The thought that he was about to meet Hellice—Hellice, whom he had not seen since her illness, who had sent back his letters, who had listened to evil whisperings against him—Hellice, who was dearer to him than his own soul, thrilled him with a strange and awful joy. His limbs trembled, his breath came quickly, his face grew pale, and his eyes shone with the fire of love and hope.

He paused only a moment to gain calmness, then opened the door, and found himself face to face with—Margaret Sorel!

His amazement momentarily deprived him of speech. He could only stare with dilating eyes at the tall, robust figure that stood in the centre of the room and at the dark gipsy-like face.

The woman, though equally astonished, was the first to speak.

"Richard!" she exclaimed, retreating a step. "So it is you who wish to see me. Have you followed me here from Wharton simply to have an interview with me?"

The sound of her voice stung the young Baronet into self-control. He looked around the chamber with a quick, apprehensive glance, and cried:

"Where is she? Where is Hellice?"

"How should I know?" was the response.

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

BAKER—One who gets his own bread by adulterating that of others.

SPEAKING of men's fashionable hats, should one say "the latest style" or "the latest tile?"

A YOUNG physician asking permission of a last to kiss her, she replied: "No, sir; I never like a *doctor's bill* stuck in my face."

A DEFULTER, on having his frauds exposed, committed suicide, and the verdict of the coroner's jury was: "Died from exposure."

SPENCER tells us that only sleep and laughter rest the brain. On this theory, says the Journal of Education, sermonizers and humorists must be the world's greatest benefactors.

"A MATHEMATICIAN, being asked by a stout fellow, "If two pigs weigh twenty pounds, how much will a large hog weigh?" replied: "Jump into the scales, and I will tell you immediately!"

A CANDIDATE, meeting a neighbour on election day, grasped his hand, and said: "My dear sir, I am very glad to see you." "You needn't be, for I've already voted," quietly replied the neighbour.

UPON the marriage of a rather wild young man, his mother-in-law said to him: "Now that you are married, I hope you will mend your ways." To which he replied: "You may depend upon it, madam, that this is my last folly."

A RAILWAY passenger, in going out to the train, refused to show his ticket to the gatekeeper, saying: "You know me well enough. My face is my ticket." "Oh, well, retorted the gatekeeper, displaying a big fist, "my orders are to punch all tickets."

"Doctor," said a lady to the physician who was attending her husband, "is Reuben any worse?" "Yes; he is wandering in his mind," replied the doctor. "Oh!" exclaimed the lady, who seemed to know Reuben thoroughly; "he's wandering in his mind, is he? Well, he can't go far!"

An editor who had suffered a good deal from a stitch in his side, finally had a needle removed from his body by a surgeon, whereupon the editor of the rival paper unfeeling remarked: "Our contemporary will now have no difficulty in concluding what was the cause of those stitches in his side."

A YOUNG man at a summer resort astonished a circle of ladies and gentlemen by saying: "Thank goodness, I've found one waiter in this hotel that never takes a tip, and yet is always on hand ready for duty." "Which one is it?" eagerly inquired his auditors. "The dumb-waiter," answered the young man.

AS a number of persons were discussing the question of bodily strength, and telling about men who could lift enormous weights, a little boy exclaimed: "I heard of the man who can lift more 'n any of 'em, this morning." "Who was he, sonny?" asked one of the gentlemen. "I don't know what his name was, but he was a *shop-lifter*," was the triumphant reply.

"Do you think, mamma," said a little one, "that Uncle Richard is a good man?" "Why, my child, he is the best of all my brothers, and an excellent man?" "And will he go to Heaven?" "I think so, my dear. Why do you ask?" "Oh, nothing much, said the child," waking from a sort of reverie. "I was thinking what a plain angel he would make, that's all."

HOW TO REFUSE A LOAN.—A young city clerk who felt inclined for a trip to the seaside, called upon a friend. "Hal, my dear boy," said he, "I'm off for my holiday, and I find I'm a trifle short. Lend me a tenner, will you?" Hal, after a pause, which apparently included a mental examination of his financial arrangements: "Well—Phil—to tell you the truth—I do not feel—disposed—at present—to make any—permanent investments."

FATHER: "Tom, Tom! this'll never do. Past eleven o'clock, and you've been in bed fifteen hours out o' the twenty-four." Tom: "But it's cheap, gov'nor—costs nothing. Wh'r as directly a fellow's up and dressed expenses begin!"

A STROKED, red-nosed man offered to wager that he could close his eyes, and, simply by taste, name any kind of liquor in the house. The bet was taken. "This is genuine port," said the fat man, tasting from a wineglass; "and this is whisky, and so on. A wag then poured a few drops of water into a glass, and handed it to the taster. "This is—ah—ah—this is (tasting it several times)—by Jupiter! gentlemen, I lose the bet! I never tasted this liquor before!"

ONE of the wittiest as well as one of the most brilliant men in Lancashire, and who had occupied a seat on the bench as one of the great unpaid, was in a case before a judge who was chiefly remarkable for obtuseness, he took occasion to say that he had often seen a great ass in judicial robes. "You speak from experience, I suppose," was the angry retort. "Not at all," replied the judge. "I am speaking directly from observation."

YOUNG GOSHEN LIGHTHEAD doesn't go up to see Miss Lusie Browning any more. He called the other evening, and after waiting in the parlour about half-an-hour, received a note from her, addressed: "Mr. Goshen Lighthead, at home." When she came in directly afterward, she was astonished to find him gone. But a note on the table explained: "Gone to the address of your note to read its contents." She says some people take hints that were never intended.

"I DON'T believe in feeding tramps at the door," said Mrs. Crimsonbeak. "You feed them once, and they are sure to come back." "Well, I don't know," replied Mrs. Yeast. "I always give them bread when they come to my door, and I can't say that I ever knew a tramp to come the second time." "Oh, well, Mrs. Yeast, you make your own bread, do you not?" This was all that was said, and yet Mrs. Yeast went down the street like a straw hat on a windy day.

"WON'T you go up, dear, and get my goats off the dressing-table?" "Your goats?" queried Jones. "What new-fangled thing's that?" "I'll show you," remarked the wife. And she sailed up stairs and down again with a pair of kids on her hands. "There they are," said she. "Why, I call those kids," said the surprised husband. "Oh, do you?" replied the wife. "So did I once, but they are so old now I'm ashamed to call them anything but goats." Jones took the hint.

WHY A GOOD MAN FAILS.—"What a shame—nob out of business again, are you?" "Yes; my last venture busted the first week." "That's queer. I thought you started a little factory to darn stockings for young men, old bachelors, and others, with no women folks to look after them. That ought to pay." "Pay! I got more orders than I could fill; hired a whole lot of nice girls who knew how to darn stockings, and they did their work beautifully; but then the enterprise busted." "Why, what happened?" "Girls all left." "Dis-satisfied?" "No; the whole crowd of customers hunted 'em on Sunday, and up-and-married them.

"TEACHING, to me," said an enthusiastic young school-mistress, "is a holy calling. To sow in the young mind the seeds of future knowledge, and watch them grow up and develop, is a pleasure greater than I can tell. I never weary of my work. I think only of—" "I am very sorry," interrupted the young man to whom she was talking, "that you are so devoted to your profession, Miss Clara. I had hoped that some day I might ask you—in fact, I called to-night—but I hardly dare go on, in the light of what you—" "You may go on, Mr. Smith," said the young lady, softly; "I'm a little too enthusiastic at times, perhaps."

BRIDE: "Dear me, you don't seem to have the least idea about cooking." New Girl: "You see, ma'am, I haven't any one to show me." "Why, I don't know anything about it. You ought to know; you said you had ten years' experience." "Yes, ma'am; but I've all along lived with young married ladies like you, and every one of 'em was as big a dunces as you are about things."

ROBINS: "Well, Jones, how did you come out in our Civil Service examination for the position of microscopist in the Agricultural Department?" Jones: "Poorly, Robinson, poorly." Robinson: "Why, that's singular. I thought you had studied upon microscopy?" Jones: "So I had; but they didn't examine me on that." Robinson: "What did they examine you on?" Jones: "They asked me who the author of the 'Bread-Winners' was."

SUNDAY SCHOOL teachers need to exercise caution and stick to facts when instructing their classes, or they will be tripped up. For instance, a young miss who has a class of small boys, was rehearsing the story of the flood, and said: "Just think, it rained a whole year, and the entire earth was covered with water." One bright youngster eyed her keenly as he listened intently to her, and as this last statement was made he exclaimed: "Oh go on; it must have frozen over some of the time."

TRUST CITIZEN: "See here, sir, that land you sold me is under water half the time." Real Estate Man: "Yes, I supposed you wanted it for a fish-pond. Don't see what you bought it for if you didn't." "Why on earth didn't you say it wasn't fit to build on?" How was I to know the river Thames had a mortgage on it?" "I stated the fact that it was very low land in my advertisement." "Never said a word about it." "Oh, you're mistaken. It was in great big type: 'Land for Sale. Very Low.'"

SMITH: "What did you pay for this cigar?" Jones: "Grocer gave it with a cabbage head. Why—like it?" Smith: "I should say not! It would kill a horse." Jones: "Throw it away, then." Smith: "Never! Must get used to the brand. We are to have a lady visitor, and I'll smoke her out or die." Jones: "That's a strange way to treat a lady. Who is she?" Smith: "She's a relative by marriage." Jones: "What! the elderly person who used to shout down the stairs, 'Mary, it is nearly eleven o'clock?'" Smith: "The same."

LIBERTS.

HAPPINESS consists in being happy. This is the quickest and best definition I know.

To play a fast-rate game of lawn-tennis, a young man don't want to be able to do anything else well.

No man can ever be a good talker until he has first learned to be a good listener.

The man who isn't prepared, at enny time, to forget at least one-half he has learned, never will become very wise.

Nature never makes enny mistakes or blunders—that mortals kan remedy. She often puts an extra crook in a dog's tail, just for fun; but the crook can't be straightened without spoiling the tail.

We can't help but envy those who always appear to be happy; and yet to be always happy a man must be a phool.

There are plenty of people who seem to have been born just on purpose to ask questions, and never be satisfied with the answers. When they reach the celestial gate, and Saint Peter tells them to enter, they will wonder if he has got it right.

The fury or a great man is less to be feared than his familiarity.

There are too many in the world who would rather do a knunning thing than a kind one. All knunning is not wicked, but it iz on the way that leads to wickedness.

Whenever a woman undertakes to play the clown, she makes a phool ov herself, and the business too.

JOSH BILLINGS.

SOCIETY.

The Queen has placed Abergeldie Castle at the disposal of the German Crown Prince and Crown Princess; but when they leave the Isle of Wight at the end of next month they are probably going after a short stay at Potsdam, to North Italy—either to Pegli, near Genoa, or to Lord Carnarvon's villa on the Eastern Riviera, near Porto Flino.

THE Duke of Connaught, by command of the Queen, paid a visit to the three men now under treatment at Haslar Hospital for injuries received at the Naval Review, by the explosion on board her Majesty's ship *Kite*. His Royal Highness, who was conducted to the ward by Inspector-General Breakey and members of the medical staff, expressed to the men Her Majesty's warm sympathy. The Duke of Connaught subsequently returned to Osborne House, and reported to the Queen that the injured men are rapidly recovering. The Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne left Osborne in the Royal yacht *Alberta*, and proceeded to Haslar Hospital, where they visited the three injured sailors, remaining with them for nearly half-an-hour, and repeating Her Majesty's expressions of sympathy.

PRINCE GEORGE OF WALES presented the prizes to the boys of Greenwich Hospital Schools on the 21st July, and in addressing them said that in the course of not many years he hoped to meet some of them afloat. Loud applause followed his announcement that he had obtained for them from the Admiralty an additional week's holiday on account of the Jubilee.

THE Duchess of Cambridge has recently completed her ninetieth year. Early in the day her Royal Highness received visits from the Duke of Cambridge, the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz and their children, and the Princess Mary-Adelaide (Duchess of Teck) and the Duke of Teck and their children. The Prince and Princess of Wales and their daughters, the Princesses Louise, Victoria, and Maud, called personally to offer their congratulations. The Crown Princess of Germany, the King of the Hellenes, and the Duke of Sparta, also, visited the Duchess and stayed some time with her Royal Highness.

A FASHIONABLE congregation assembled at St. Paul's Church, Knightsbridge to witness the marriage of Captain Lewis Butler, King's Royal Rifles, and Miss Adelaide Bulteel, daughter of Mr. John C. Bulteel, of Pamflete, Devon.

Major Archer (King's Royal Rifles) acted as best man to the bridegroom; and the bridesmaids were the five sisters and a niece of the bride, and a niece of the bridegroom. They wore dresses of pale blue crepe, prettily draped and caught up with gauze ribbon of the same colour, their white open straw hats being turned up with blue velvet and trimmed with gauze ribbon and white ospreys; each wore a diamond fly brooch, the bridegroom's gift, and carried a posy of white roses tied with white satin ribbon.

The bride wore a dress of rich white moiré, with garniture and fringes of orange blossoms, and the bodice was trimmed with lace; a few sprays of orange blossoms were worn in the hair, covered by a tulle veil. Lady Rovestoke, aunt of the bride, wore brown satin, striped with narrow cream lines, and a brown tulle bonnet with pale blue osprey; Viscountess Castlerose wore a pretty white dress striped with satin, and a tulle bonnet with a bordering of jessamine all round the front, the Hon. Mrs. Frederick Lambton, sister of the bride, was in grey, with velvet mantelet much trimmed with steel, and grey bonnet with pia trimmings.

STATISTICS.

THE royal plate belonging to the British Crown is kept in two strong rooms at Windsor Castle. If it ever should be sold it would fetch about £2,000,000.

It has been computed that the death-rate of the globe is 67 a minute, 97,790 a day, and 35,639,835 a year, and the birth rate 70 a minute, 100,800 a day, and 36,792,000 a year.

The grasshopper plague is giving serious trouble in Algeria this year. The efforts made to destroy the eggs have proved useless. In one district 50,000 gallons have been collected and burned. This represents the destruction of 7,250,000,000 insects.

THE plan of the German Government to provide for workmen in their old age will be applied at first only to industrial workmen, of which it is estimated the number is 7,251,000. The minimum pension to be allowed is 120 marks yearly, the State, employers and workmen each contributing one-third of the pension fund, which will be a tax on each individual of three marks yearly. It is estimated that a State credit of 22,000,000 marks will be required. All workmen over fifty years of age when the Bill is passed will be excluded from its benefits.

GEMS.

IT is the struggle and not the attainment that measures character.

To make the most of the good and the least of the evil of life is the best philosophy of existence.

He is happy whose circumstances suit his temper; but he is more excellent who can suit his temper to any circumstances.

MODESTY is the lowest of the virtues, and is a confession of the deficiency it indicates. He who undervalues himself is justly undervalued by others.

CONTENTMENT produces in some measure all those effects which the alchemist usually ascribes to what he calls the philosopher's stone; and if it does not bring riches, it does the same thing by banishing the desire of them.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

GASCONY BUTTER.—Take equal quantities of parsley picked from the stalk and parboiled, of anchovies washed, boned, and pounded, and of fresh butter. Mix the ingredients well together, and pass them through a hair sieve; shape the butter into egg-shaped balls, ice them, and serve with a piece of toast under each ball.

WATERCRESS BUTTER.—Pick the leaves of a quantity of watercress, and mince them as finely as you can; then dry them in a cloth; mince them still more, and dry them again; then knead them with as much fresh butter as they will take up, adding a very little salt and white pepper, and with a couple of butter pats make your watercress butter into as many pats of as many shapes as you are able to work out.

CORN BREAD.—One-half pint of white corn meal and an equal quantity of flour, one-half pint of sweet milk, one tablespoonful of sugar, one-half teaspoonful of salt, one teaspoonful of soda and two of cream of tartar, or three small teaspoonfuls of baking-powder; two eggs, and one teaspoonful of butter. Stir butter and sugar together, add the eggs, then the milk and salt, and last the dry ingredients. The flour, meal, and baking-powder, or soda and cream of tartar, should be stirred together and sifted twice. Beat thoroughly, and pour in a well-greased pan not much deeper than a pie tin. Bake till a broom-straw run in will be dry. Serve hot.

MISCELLANEOUS.

TO COVER HER PRETTY FOOT.—Bronze sandals are fashionable this summer for dressy house wear. The Egyptian sandal has the diminutive toe, covered with an embroidery of gay cashmere and beads, some designs showing little palms in brilliant colours. The Roman sandal is strapped over the instep and fastened by a buckle of real silver, with a Roman medallion in the centre. The "Cleveland" sandal is made of black satin, with jet embroidery on the toe and lined with scarlet silk. The Chinese sandal has a shapely-pointed toe and a "common-sense" heel. The "Dieppe" sandal is of black undressed kid, to be worn with dark red silk hose, and the Richelieu shoe of bronze is a street foot covering, to be worn with dark, golden-brown silk hose.

OYSTER CULTURE.—Oyster production, although carried on to a large extent in France, is not yet a profitable investment. The reason is that the rates for transportation from the oyster-beds are too high. In Aury, for instance, oysters are worth nine francs per thousand; in Paris they cost more than fifty francs. An attempt is being made to secure transportation at less cost. A movement is on foot in the North Sea Towns of Germany for promoting oyster culture along the coast, supported by Government grants. At present there are fifty-one banks in the North Sea—viz., twenty-six at Fano, Romoe and Sylt, and twenty-five at Fohr, Amrum and Hallingerne. In the Baltic, on the other hand, all attempts at oyster culture have failed. "Holstein" or "Flensburg" oysters—considered the best in Germany—are really English or Dutch. All the German oyster-banks are the property of the State, and leased to private individuals.

WHERE CONSUMPTION STRIKES.—In a consideration of pulmonary consumption, Professor Hirsh reaches these conclusions: (1) Phthisis is everywhere prevalent—being a disease of all times, countries and races—but it is rare in polar regions, and rarer still at high altitude; (2) It chiefly results from overcrowding and bad hygiene; (3) Heat and cold by themselves have no influence; (4) Damp, with frequent changes in temperature, predisposes to the disease, but dampness of the soil has more effect than humidity of the air; (5) Occupation has a most important but chiefly indirect influence, according to its tendency to good or bad hygienic conditions. Professor Hirsh finds the world's death-rate from phthisis to be 3 per 1,000, or nearly one-seventh of the mortality from all causes. In Vienna the rate is 7.7 per 1,000; in Berlin and Dresden only 3.8; while among nomad tribes, the Kirghiz of Central Asia and the Bedouins of Arabia, the disease is unknown except when the members change their habits and live in towns.

A FRENCH LOVE POWDER.—A curious instance of how deeply old superstitions are still rooted in remote parts of the country, is a case which has just been brought before the magistrates of Marquet, in the department of Loiret, in France. A short time ago the grave-digger of Fontenay-sur-Loing said to some workmen with whom he was talking at a Ferrières factory: "Perhaps you think that dead men's bones are of no use to any one; but you are mistaken. I have sold some to two women from Ferrières." The police hearing of this occurrence made inquiries, and the following facts were revealed: The women from Ferrières went to Fontenay-sur-Loing and asked the grave-digger for some human bones. At first he refused, but was soon persuaded to yield by an ample bribe. The women, who passed in the district for sorceresses, returned home, hiding the bones for a short time, and then burning them and carefully gathering up the cinders, their purpose being to prepare a love draught for a young and pretty country lass, who had ordered it to reconquer the heart of a lover who had turned her off.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

N. T.—Your handwriting is fair, but indicates no particular individuality.

M. T. N.—We know of no country in which all the conditions to which you refer exist.

W. R.—A "lame duck" is a stock-broker's term for one who fails to meet his engagements.

M. M. W.—A trade is preferable to any other occupation named by you. Apply in person, and get all the information you possibly can in regard to the trade selected.

H. S. W.—1. The stationary population of Jerusalem is about 20,000, but about Easter the number is annually augmented by a great throng of Christian, Mohammedan, and Jewish pilgrims. 2. The language spoken in Jerusalem is the Arabic.

W. H. H.—As we have said to other correspondents, the violins of Stradivarius are now extremely rare. It is stated that even the National Conservatoire of Music in Paris has not been able to secure an authentic instrument of the famous Cremona make.

C. F. S.—Pillow lace is a fine kind of lace worked by the hand upon a pillow or cushion, stuck according to the pattern with pins, around which linen or silk threads are twisted and woven off a series of bobbins. A very fine quality of this lace is made at Honiton, in Devonshire, and is hence called Honiton lace.

EMMA.—To pickle one gallon of cherries, to two quarts of vinegar put one pound of sugar, once ounce of mace, cloves, and cinnamon mixed; boil and skim it, and when cold, pour it over the cherries; then draw off the vinegar in two or three days' time; boil it, and pour it again upon the cherries. This is done twice to preserve them.

L. P.—The coast of Honduras was discovered by Columbus in 1502. The country was taken possession of by Cortes in 1526. It entered into the Central American Confederation in 1823, but became an independent Republic in 1839. It is now governed by a President, a single Minister, and an Assembly of thirty-seven Representatives.

E. S. W.—To petrify wooden objects, take equal quantities of rock salt, rock alum, white vinegar, chalk, and pebbles, powdered. Mix all these ingredients, and ebullition will ensue. After it has ceased, throw some wooden objects into this liquid, and let them soak for four or five days, at the end of which time they will be transformed into petrifications.

ALLIE.—To make glycerine soap balls, to any recent made toilet soap, sliced, and melted by a gentle heat, without water, if possible, add the purest glycerine, in the proportion of one ounce to the pound. Thoroughly incorporate them by vigorous stirring, which should be continued until the mass has cooled considerably, when it should at once be made into balls.

W. H. N.—Scaling wax, first made in India, was once in very popular use, but is now very seldom employed, except in fixing seals to legal and state papers. It is made of lac mixed with a little turpentine and resin and some colouring matter. The red scaling wax is coloured with vermilion, and the black with ivory black. Golden sealing wax has powdered yellow mica mixed with the lac.

B. F. C.—The famous Damascus blades are described, were particularly distinguished for their keen edge, their great hardness, toughness, and elasticity, and the splendid play of prismatic colour upon the surfaces, especially when viewed in an oblique light. Modern science was long taxed in vain to imitate this variegated or watered appearance, which is now accomplished by a solution of sulphate of iron.

B. R. C.—An accurate detailed description of the new cruisers and gun-boats for the United States Navy can only be obtained at the Navy Department, Washington, U.S., where Secretary Whitney, under authority conferred by the Act of Congress making appropriations for the naval service, approved March 3rd, 1887, will receive proposals for their construction until August 1st, 1887. The published reports give only an idea of the models furnished.

R. E. A. D.—The balm of Gilead is another name for the balsam of Mecca or of Syria. The balsam has a yellowish or greenish colour, a warm and somewhat bitter aromatic taste, and a fragrant smell, and is the product of a tree indigenous to Arabia and Abyssinia. It is valued as an odoriferous ointment or ointment by the Turks. The term balm of Gilead is also applied to a species of American poplar; also to a fir tree, from which a resin is obtained and sold as Canada balsam.

C. H. S.—A triangular stone suspended from the north angle of the ancient castle of Blarney, situated in a village of the same name in Ireland, is known the world over as the "Blarney Stone." It rests about twenty feet from the top of the castle, and on it are inscribed the following words: "Cormack MacCarthy fortis me fieri fecit, A.D. 1446" (Cormack MacCarthy the brave caused me to be placed here, A.D. 1446). Tradition states that the castle was besieged by the English under Carew, Earl of Totnes, who, having concluded an armistice with the commander of the castle on condition of its surrender, waited long for the fulfilment of the terms, but was put off from day to day with various soft speeches and excuses, until he became the laughing-stock of Elizabeth's ministers and the dupe of the Lord of Blarney. Since that day, "kissing the Blarney stone" has been synonymous with flattery and smooth, deceitful words.

W. T.—Anthropology is that branch of science which comprehends anatomy, physiology, psychology and all other sciences pertaining to man.

C. H.—The only method of ridding yourself of the "wild eyelashes" is to persistently pluck them out in the same manner as is at present pursued by you. Clipping their ends will obviate the nuisance to a certain degree and thus relieve you of a great deal of annoyance.

W. F.—The public schools of this country have reached such a high degree of perfection that parents need not fear that careful, painstaking children will fail to get an excellent education after a steady attendance. Concerning the morality of these schools, the majority of them are far superior to many private institutions in this respect.

A. F.—The largest of all flowers is known by the name of Rafflesia, so called in honour of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, at one time the British governor of Sumatra, of which island this plant is a native. One species, discovered in 1818 (*Rafflesia Arnoldii*), measures fully three feet in diameter, is capable of containing almost two gallons of fluid, and sometimes weighs ten pounds.

D. C.—If this column was intended as a medium for the free advertising of business firms, no objection could be offered by us to the publication herein of the addresses of such. However, it was never instituted for that purpose, and consequently we invariably refuse to give information of that kind, always referring the querist to the advertising columns of the newspapers and magazines of the day, or to business directories.

GOLDEN-ROD.

"The way is long," the lost boy said.
The stars were shining overhead;
The silence of the deep black woods,
Its dim and deathlike solitudes,
And unseen dangers, round him lay.
Great shadows rose and barred his way.
Afraid to pass, he paused and wept—
Lay down upon the moss and slept.

In dreams a mother soothed his fears;
The night-dews mingled with his tears;
Like a forgotten sunbeam there,
About him strayed his golden hair.
A snake beneath his outstretched arm
Slipped by, nor sought to do him harm.
At midnight, when the winds were wild,
An angel came and found the child.

The woods were blighted by the frost;
Dead leaves above the dead were tossed
Came Winter on a flying cloud
And robed him in a snowy shroud;
And Spring—a maid from holy-lands—
Put purple violets in his hands,
And Summer brought her birds to sing
Where his still heart lay mouldering.

The sun, the snow, the wind, the rain,
Resolved him into dust again,
And Autumn in the wilderness
Found nothing but a silken treas.
She wound it on a slender rod
And set it in the withered sod,
And so the lost boy's golden locks
Make glory on the lichenized rocks.

M. I.

M. N.—When publishers purchase the copyright of an article that person cannot republish the same in book form without the consent of the first-named parties. The article becomes the exclusive property of the publishers when they pay the price of it to the writer, who, in accepting such pay, parted with all right to it as its author, unless, of course, at the time of purchase it was mutually agreed that he could issue it in the shape of a book.

S. S.—One of the simplest cures for ingrowing toenails is to cut out of the centre of the nail a V-shaped piece. In the course of time this will grow together, and cause the ingrowing portion to resume its normal position. Another remedy is to lift up the corner of the nail with a penknife and allow two or three drops of hot suet to fall upon the inflamed flesh; or instead of this place a piece of soft cotton under the corner which grows downward. Still another way is to paint the inflamed part with liquid perchloride of iron, which nummifies the skin and deadens the pain. In the course of two or three weeks the dead skin may be easily removed by soaking the foot in warm water and peeling it off with a knife or the thumb-nail.

A. M. C.—The best lithographic stones are found at Kelheim and Selenhofen, near Pappenheim, on the Danube, in Bavaria; but they are also imported from Silesia, France, Canada, and the West Indies. A few years ago some were quarried in Kentucky, but after trial were discovered to be too heavy and of inferior quality. The stones vary in size from 5 inches up to 48 by 60 inches, and are sold by weight. No duty is levied upon lithographic stones imported into this country. Like all other mercantile commodities the prices asked for them vary at different times according to the supply and demand. They vary in colour from a pale, yellowish white to a light buff, reddish, pearl-grey, light grey, blue and greenish hue. Those of uniform colour are the best. The yellow-buff ones, being soft, are adapted for lettering and transfer; the pearl-grey, being harder, for chalk drawings and engraving.

R. W.—Bathe frequently, avoid all excitement, and indulge in plenty of healthful exercise. Such a course will in all probability strengthen you both mentally and physically, and in a short time cause a change in your mode of living. If not, the only alternative is a resort to medicine, prescribed by a competent physician.

L. M.—It would not be advisable for a man to marry a lady fifteen years his junior, for the simple reason that when he has passed middle age she will be a mere girl in comparison, and as a natural consequence they could have no tastes in common and would be likely to become tired of each other. To be sure, there are several instances where the reverse is the case, but in reality they are only the exceptions that prove the general rule.

W. W.—Croton oil is expressed from the seeds of a plant which is native of Ceylon, Molucca, Hindostan, and other parts of Asia. It was known in Europe as early as 1830, but attracted little notice. A dose consists of one or two drops, and on account of the promptness of its action, it is employed where other medicines would be difficult of administration, especially in the case of patients in a comatose state. It has a bitter, burning taste, and a slight odour. The colour is yellow.

D. C. C.—Culloden House is a family seat in Scotland, four miles from Inverness, which gave its name to the battle that ended the career of the Pretender in the rebellion of 1745, fought April 16, 1746. The English troops were led by the Duke of Cumberland. The Prince's army, commanded by Charles Edward in person, had little or no artillery, with which arm the enemy were well supplied. The Highlanders stood firm, and after great carnage on both sides, the Highlanders, unsupported and unoffered, broke and fled.

W. L.—Sugar, butter, cheese, potatoes, pie, rice, beans, peas, sage, arrowroot, tapioca, macaroni, beer and other malt liquors—in fact, any article composed principally of sugar or starch constituents—have a tendency to increase one's flesh in the majority of instances, although such increase does not always follow the consumption of the articles named. A contented, peaceful state of mind has much to do in adding to the roundness of the human race, and therefore those who go through life in a continual fretful state of mind generally take upon themselves "a lean and hungry look."

R. C.—How can you expect us to hazard our single blessedness by acting as a proxy for you in proposing marriage to the young lady? This is a simple and absolute impossibility. If you have not sufficient pluck to pop the question, it would be better to give up courtship and settle down to the life of a confirmed recluse. Perhaps, however, she may take advantage of the leap-year privileges accorded to ladies, and when such time arrives reverse the order of things and cast her love, if not her fortune, at your feet. If such should happen, we devoutly hope that your extreme bashfulness will not stand in the way of accepting her generous offer.

A. W.—"Ginger pop," made according to the following formula, is a most refreshing and harmless drink. The ingredients required are twenty-eight pounds of crushed white sugar, thirty gallons of water, one pint of yeast, one pound of the best powdered ginger, half ounce essence of lemon, and quarter ounce essence of cloves. On the ginger pour half a gallon of boiling water and let it stand fifteen or twenty minutes. Dissolve the sugar in two gallons of warm water, pour both in a barrel half filled with cold water, then add the essences and the yeast. Allow it to stand for half-an-hour, fill up with cold water, let it ferment from six to twelve hours, and finally bottle.

M. H.—I. According to strict etiquette, tea and coffee should never be poured into a saucer to cool, it being considered a sign of poor breeding to thus run the risk of soiling the table-cloth. To be sure, when you are in your own home you can do as you please; but it is always right to be well-bred, no matter under what circumstances one may be placed. At home, fold your napkin and place it in your ring at the conclusion of the meal; but if visiting, it should be left unfolded beside your plate. At one time it was considered impolite to take the last piece upon the plate, but in these days it is not observed, as it is supposed that the vacancy can be supplied if necessary. When sending a plate to be rinsed, the knife and fork should be placed on one side of it. The fork is the proper instrument for conveying food to the mouth, and none but thoughtless or ill-bred persons will use a knife for that purpose. 2. Very neat.

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